
THE DAILY NEWS DIGEST

June 29, 2010

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DAILY NEWS DIGEST ARTICLES

June 29, 2010

Section I: Texas Air

Texas' Environmental Agency & The Feds: This Week May Be Crucial

Houston Press, 06/28/10

Summary: All eyes are on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality this week as its three commissioners will decide whether to grant an air permit to a proposed \$3 billion petroleum coke-fired power plant in Corpus Christi. The Las Brisas Energy Center has been criticized by health and environmental advocates but heralded by local business and government for the jobs and tax revenue the power plant could generate. Late last year, however, a pair of administrative law judges spent two weeks examining the Las Brisas air permit and recommended that the TCEQ commissioners deny it or send it back for revisions.

EPA toxics standards for cities are 10 years late -- IG

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: More than 10 years after releasing a plan to reduce health risks from toxic emissions in urban areas, U.S. EPA has not followed through with new rules or updated risk assessments for smaller local sources, according to a new report by the agency's inspector general. Upon the release of the Integrated Urban Air Toxics Strategy in 1999, the agency sounded an alarm about city-dwellers' exposure to emissions from smaller pollution sources such as cars, dry cleaners and gas stations. One in 28,000 Americans could get cancer due to these "area" sources, according to the latest assessment, with about 2 million living in areas where the lifetime risk was 1 in 10,000 or greater.

Let's get Texas back to clean air

Greentech Media, 06/26/10

Summary: It's not just the hot, humid winds of a Texas summer blowing across the Fort Worth region these days. There are also some wafting breezes of environmental change with frequent gusts of political and bureaucratic rhetoric. Fanning all that is recent notice from the Environmental Protection Agency that it will no longer look the other way regarding Texas' industry-friendly air-permitting program.

Section II: Oil Spill

Gulf oil spill through the eyes of children

USA Today, 06/29/10

Summary: My kids and I had been watching the webcam images of oil gushing from BP's pipe 5,000 feet beneath the sea and a thousand miles from our home. And then my daughter said she wanted to help oiled-up birds, so I seized on that impulse to take my three older children -- 12, 11 and 8 -- to see up close the largest oil spill in U.S. history. I pulled them out of their Virginia school for a week this month for what would become a sad and memorable adventure. We averaged 350 miles a day during our drive to the Gulf Coast, slept in a tent, and with each passing day learned about the unfolding tragedy devastating people's livelihoods, the economy and the environment.

Leaving oil spill alone might have been better for environment

Reuters, 06/29/10

Summary: It might have been better for the environment to have done nothing about the enormous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico except to keep the oil out at sea, British scientists said on Monday. Marine biology and environmental experts said they feared the aggressive cleanup operation, during which oil has been set alight and oil-dispersing chemicals have been dumped into the sea, might be more damaging than the oil itself.

Oil spill brings push for wetlands habitat

AP, 06/29/10

Summary: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill prompts a new push to quickly increase wetlands habitat for birds migrating toward the Gulf of Mexico. "More than 50 million migratory birds traveling south in coming months will instinctively head toward the marshes and coastlands of the northern Gulf of Mexico," said Kevin Norton, state conservationist for Louisiana in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Biden oil spill visit update: White House releases new details of 2-state trip

Birmingham News, 06/28/10

*Summary: The White House today announced more details of Tuesday's oil spill tour by Vice President Joe Biden, saying where he will stop in New Orleans and Pascagoula. The White House previously had said only that Biden would be coming to the Gulf Coast on Tuesday and that he would visit the command center in New Orleans and "the Florida Panhandle." *Article also in The Hill.*

BP spends \$2.65B on oil spill; denies CEO quitting

AP, 06/28/10

*Summary: BP's mounting costs for capping and cleaning up the Gulf of Mexico spill have reached \$2.65 billion, it said Monday, but the oil giant denied reports out of Russia that CEO Tony Hayward is resigning. The company's expenses climbed \$100 million per day over the weekend, according to an SEC filing Monday, as engineers eyed a tropical storm headed for the Texas-Mexico border. It was expected to miss the oil spill area but could still generate disruptive waves and winds. *Article also in San Antonio Express, Caller.com.*

Oil spill takes emotional toll similar to that from Katrina

AP, 06/28/10

Summary: The Gulf of Mexico oil disaster is bringing back feelings that are far too familiar to shrimper Ricky Robin and others still dealing with the physical and emotional toll wrung by Hurricane Katrina five years ago. "I can't sleep at night. I find myself crying sometimes," said Robin, of Violet, a blue-collar community on the southeastern edge of the New Orleans suburbs.

Tropical Storm Alex forecast to strengthen; could push oil toward Gulf Coast

Birmingham News, 06/28/10

Summary: Tropical Storm Alex may become a major hurricane as it churns toward the Texas-Mexico border forcing the evacuation of some rigs and sending swells at the oil slick created by the U.S.'s worst spill. The storm may grow into at least a Category 3 system, with minimum winds of 111 mph (178 kph), before making landfall early July 1, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

BP oil spill reaches another US state

ABC News, 06/28/10

Summary: The news comes as BP raises its spill cost so far to \$US2.65 billion (\$3 billion), an increase of about \$US300 million (\$344 million) over the weekend. Oil had previously only come ashore in Alabama, Florida and the hardest hit state, Louisiana. Hundreds of globs of brown oil began washing ashore Mississippi tourist beaches at Ocean Springs and fishing hot spots on Sunday.

Mousse patties begin washing up on Front Beach

Birmingham News, 06/28/10

Summary: Tar patties from the Gulf oil spill starting washing ashore Front Beach around noon on Monday, a day after the oil first made landfall on the Mississippi mainland in Jackson County. Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran and four aldermen were on the scene with emergency officials, evaluating the latest discovery of oil on the shore.

Texas prepares for effects from oil spill

Mckinney Courier-Gazette, 06/28/10

Summary: Last week, Governor Rick Perry announced that Texas is prepared to respond to any effects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill along the Texas coast. The State Operations Center has remained at an increased readiness level and the State continues to work with federal and local authorities to track the spill and prepare contingency plans. The Office of the Governor participates in daily conference calls with the White House, Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and gulf state governors.

Head of BP's Gulf oil spill response has survived trials

AP, 06/28/10

Summary: He has been cast in the role of fixer, sent in to clean up after BP's gaffe-prone chief executive and oversee efforts to contain the Gulf of Mexico oil gusher. But Robert Dudley is really more of a diplomat. In his first week running the spill response for BP, Dudley shuttled between the Gulf and Washington, defended BP engineers after a setback, toured a center where oil-covered turtles are treated and enlisted the help of a politically connected relief expert.

Got a fix for the Gulf oil spill? It may be worth a prize

AP, 06/28/10

Summary: The X Prize Foundation wants to make fixing the BP oil spill a multimillion dollar competition. It has done the same for space, fuel efficient cars and gene-mapping. Foundation Vice President Francis Beland says his group is kicking around the idea. They've already received 35,000 unsolicited ideas for fixing the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Ex-FEMA director could help BP out of its disaster

AP, 06/28/10

Summary: James Lee Witt, America's go-to guy for disaster response, knows how to take an unpopular organization and turn it around. If BP hires the former Federal Emergency Management Agency director to help with community relations, it could further a makeover of the oil giant's Gulf Coast image. Last week, the company's British CEO, Tony Hayward, stepped down from managing the day-to-day operations of the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history. Hayward handed off the job to managing director Bob Dudley, a Mississippi native.

How Much Has Spilled, and How Far? Seeking Answers as Questions Mount

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 06/28/10

Summary: Since the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in April, killing 11 and setting off the biggest maritime oil spill in the nation's history, questions about the potential dimensions of the disaster have only multiplied from week to week. Readers have been asking whether the oil can be contained, how serious the damage will be and what they can do to help. Following is a primer on the spill.

Tighter-fitting cap could stop leak ahead of relief well

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: BP PLC and federal officials are considering a tighter-fitting cap that could kill the leaking well in the Gulf of Mexico before a relief well intercepts it in August, a top BP official said today. Crews could shut in the ruptured well with the new sealing cap if pressure and other conditions are right, Kent Wells, BP's senior vice president of exploration and production, told reporters today during a technical briefing. But the company still has a "much greater chance of killing the well from the bottom than the top," he said.

With oil spill hurting supplies, U.S. seafood suppliers look overseas for shrimp

AP, 06/28/10

Summary: As the Gulf Coast oil spill continues to gush, U.S. seafood suppliers are turning to Asia to ensure Americans have enough shrimp for their gumbos, Creoles and cocktails this summer, but some of those overseas cupboards are low themselves. Several countries in the world's top shrimp-producing region are struggling to satisfy their own appetites for shrimp because of disease, drought and the economic crisis. The oil spill is one more factor driving prices skyward, sending a worldwide ripple through an already tight shrimp market.

Gulf Shrimp Oil-Tainted? Grow Them in the Pacific

Greentech Media, 06/28/10

Summary: BP's oil spill in the Gulf and an already-tight global shrimp market have stimulated shrimp prices. Shrimp, which ranks among the world's most valuable seafood, is a favorite among U.S. consumers. More than half the shrimp consumed worldwide is farmed, with the majority being cultivated in Asia and Latin America, a market valued at \$20 billion per year.

U.S. plans 'extraordinary measures' to rescue turtles

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: About 50,000 sea turtle eggs from beaches in the Florida Panhandle and Alabama will be dug up and moved to Florida's Atlantic Coast in hopes of keeping the hatchlings alive in the face of the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Without the unprecedented intervention, federal scientists say, most, if not all, the hatchlings this year would be at high risk of encountering oil and dying.

Scientists debate value of cleaning oiled birds

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: With contractors for BP PLC cleaning crude-soaked birds along the Gulf Coast, some scientists are questioning whether the bird rehabilitation effort is doing more good for wildlife or for BP's battered image. "Companies that are responsible for oil spills derive a public relations benefit worth millions of dollars from cleaning oiled birds," Brian Sharp, a ornithologist from Portland, Ore., wrote on his website. "These efforts mislead the public to think that the damage to habitat and wildlife caused by oil can be 'fixed' when any fix is at best limited, and can make things even worse."

Oil firms vow safety in wells far deeper than BP's

Dallas Morning News, 06/27/10

Summary: The 5,000 feet of water between the Gulf of Mexico's surface and the Deepwater Horizon blowout has kept the oil and natural gas flowing. Each time BP has tried to cap its runaway well, the company has warned that no one has ever tried it at such a depth. But off the coast of Texas, companies have been drilling in far deeper water, sometimes twice as deep – and making the same environmental and safety promises that BP made for its Deepwater Horizon operation.

Shale production unaffected by Gulf oil leak

Shreveport Times, 06/27/10

Summary: The oil that's been gushing into the Gulf of Mexico for more than 60 days will leave a lasting impact upon everyday lives, livelihoods, the environment and wildlife for years to come, experts agree. The state's southern region will feel the brunt of the devastation, but ripples are reaching to this corner of the state in the form of lost jobs — and some cases, heartache. Four Sabine Parish men who worked on the Deepwater Horizon rig are survivors of the explosion that took 11 lives and sent millions of gallons of oil rushing into the waters, onto shores and into lives.

Deeper wells in Gulf of Mexico pose heightened risks

Dallas Morning News, 06/27/10

Summary: The 5,000 feet of water between the Gulf of Mexico's surface and the Deepwater Horizon blowout has kept the oil and natural gas flowing. Each time BP has tried to cap its runaway well, the company has warned that no one has ever tried it at such a depth. But off the coast of Texas, companies have been drilling in far deeper water, sometimes twice as deep – and making the same environmental and safety promises that BP made for its Deepwater Horizon operation.

Costs, questions for Gulf promise

Frederickburg.com, 06/27/10

Summary: In his Oval Office speech on the BP oil disaster, President Barack Obama declared he would reverse the devastation caused by crude oil on the area's shoreline, but pledged his administration would also address “decades of environmental degradation” and “multiple economic disasters” that have ruined the fragile Gulf Coast.

Boat Crew Members Hospitalized During Gulf Oil Spill Cleanup

StopTheHype.com, 06/27/10

Summary: Two men involved in private contract efforts to clean the recent gulf oil spill remained hospitalized Thursday evening after reportedly becoming sick while working in the waters of Breton Sound, according to local hospital officials. The U.S. Coast Guard called a total of 125 boats involved in oil cleanup operations back to port after seven crew members on four different boats became ill Wednesday night. After being hospitalized overnight, five victims were later released.

Taylor takes action after frustrating flight

SunHerald.com, 06/26/10

Summary: U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor has already begun to swing into action to resolve confusion with the oil-spill response in Mississippi waters. After a morning flight, he expressed what so many have feared — that the effort was scattered and lacked leadership or focus, while oil marched into the Mississippi Sound between the barrier islands. Taylor said the Environmental Protection Agency was using military infrared technology from aircraft in Louisiana waters and was able to distinguish heavy crude from diesel-like sheen. Such technology can also sort algae blooms from oil, he said, and can be vital to the response. But as often happens, the EPA was working separately from the Coast Guard. Taylor got them together. "I got the message to the commander, he turned around and got it to the EPA, and it's going to happen," Taylor said.

Raining oil in Louisiana? Video suggests Gulf oil spill causing crude rain

CSMonitor.com, 06/24/10

Summary: Raining oil in Louisiana? An unsettling – and unverified – amateur video shows what appears to be the aftermath of an oily rain in Louisiana, some 45 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. It's unclear from the video whether the oily sheen seen on the ground really fell from the sky. Crude oil normally doesn't evaporate, but some are speculating that oil mixed with Corexit 9500, the dispersant that BP is using on the ever-growing slick, could take to the air. The US Environmental Protection Agency has issued statements saying that the agency "has no data, information or scientific basis that suggests that oil mixed with dispersant could possibly evaporate from the Gulf into the water cycle."

Section III: Other

Tightened regulations on asbestos abatement planned in Arkansas

Mesothelioma News, 06/28/10

Summary: Environmental officials in Arkansas have proposed amending the state's asbestos abatement regulations to require more extensive air testing before, during and after asbestos projects are completed. Previously, testing was only required when a project was completed. Enviro.BLR.com reported that the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) will now require liability insurance and documentation of workers seeking asbestos certification

EPA Issues Cease And Desist Order Against Tulsa Company

KTUL, 06/28/10

Summary: The Environmental Protection Agency says a Tulsa company has violated the federal Clean Water Act and has issued a cease and desist order to stop the company from discharging pollutants. The EPA says an inspection of RAM Energy Resources, Inc.'s oil field production facility in Wichita County, Texas last month found unauthorized discharge of oil field brine and produced wastewater into Long Creek. The EPA also says the inspection revealed water located at the discharge point of entry into Long Creek was contaminated with brine discharges and salts.

EPA Again Delays Decision on Fuel-Ethanol Blend Rate Increase, an Industrial Info News Alert

Marketwire, 06/28/10

Summary: Researched by Industrial Info Resources (Sugar Land, Texas) -- The United States Environmental Protection Agency has announced that it will delay a decision on increasing the fuel-ethanol blend rate until the fall of 2010. Currently, ethanol can be blended to a maximum of only 10% with petroleum gasoline for consumers. Producers would like to increase this rate to 15%, which would obviously increase the demand for the renewable fuel.

Robert Byrd, longest-serving member of Congress in history, dies at 92

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the longest-serving member of Congress in U.S. history, died today, leaving behind a political legacy spanning generations and stirring up questions about the fate of the Senate's short-term agenda. He was 92. "The family of U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., tearfully announces the passing of the longest serving member of Congress in U.S. history," Byrd's office said in a brief statement.

Officials to discuss standards for water

Longview News Journal, 06/28/10

Summary: State environmental regulators will consider new water quality standards this week that will raise the levels of bacteria and mercury allowed in Texas lakes, streams and creeks. The potential action comes as Northeast Texans were confronted in recent days with spiking bacteria levels in Lake O' the Pines. The proposed bacteria levels are lower than the ones found last week, closing all seven designated swimming areas.

A region's new fear: An oily hurricane

USA Today, 06/28/10

Summary: Hurricanes have battered retirees Leo and Dolores Guidroz before. Katrina blew out their garage. Ike flooded their home. Each time, they rebuilt and returned to their two-story beach house, built on 8-foot stilts. This hurricane season feels scarier, says Leo Guidroz, 77. The oil staining the nearby beach already has stolen the couple's morning routine, surf fishing for speckled trout. Thick sheets of oil bob less than 5 miles offshore. He worries a strong storm surge would bathe their home in oil. "You can imagine with the oil, that water will be contaminated," he says. "We might not ever be able to come back."

Corpus Christi, Nueces County officials call emergency meetings Monday

Caller.com, 06/28/10

Summary: City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County officials are holding two meetings Monday to discuss Tropical Storm Alex. City officials will meet at 2 p.m. today in Corpus Christi City Hall, located at 1201 Leopard Street. Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal has called an emergency meeting of the county commissioners at 3 p.m. today on the third floor of the county courthouse, located at 901 Leopard Street. Officials will discuss Tropical Storm Alex, which some forecasters have predicted could come as far north as Corpus Christi by Friday. A hurricane watch has been issued for south of Baffin Bay.

Corpus Christi City Council to discuss recycling program Tuesday

Caller.com, 06/28/10

Summary: How the city recycles could depend on how much it stresses the city's budget next year. The City Council will review a cost analysis of the recycling program in its meeting Tuesday. Under the proposed budget, the recycling program is set to be upgraded midyear. The enhanced recycling will switch out 16-gallon recycling bins for 95-gallon recycling bins that don't require materials to be sorted. That program would cost the city to implement, but save the city money over time because of less stress on the city's landfills and fewer trash pickup.

Calif. may approve controversial chemical for strawberries

Greenwire, 06/28/10

Summary: The California Department of Pesticide Regulation is recommending approval of methyl iodide for fumigating strawberry fields, despite scientists' concerns. An independent scientific review panel recommended the highly toxic chemical, which has caused cancer, brain damage and miscarriages in animal studies, be limited to 0.8 parts per billion as an acceptable exposure level.

Judicial Ethics in the Gulf: Judge Feldman's Conflicts and DOJ Malpractice

Firedoglake.com, 06/28/10

Summary: Last week Federal district court judge Martin Feldman of the Eastern District of Louisiana (EDLA), in what has become a controversial decision, overturned the six month moratorium on deepwater oil drilling imposed by the Department of the Interior. It was a legally curious decision to start with as it, on its face, appeared to be contrary to the well established standard of review.

EPA to Hold Public Meetings on Hydraulic Fracturing

NewsInferno.com, 06/27/10

Summary: Recently, we have been writing about issues surrounding hydraulic fracturing—known as fracking—with the safety of this process being called into question following two recent drilling accidents in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Officials in Pennsylvania have ordered EOG Resources Inc. (EOG) to halt natural-gas drilling in the state following a well blowout there this month.

Local Tech professor monitors tropical storm as it nears oil spill

KCBD, 06/27/10

Summary: As hurricane season begins, local environmentalists are keeping a close watch on developing storms that near the oil spill, threatening to cause even more damage to the Gulf Coast. Texas Tech University Environmental Director Ron Kendall said his worst nightmare is a hurricane hitting the coast, and that oil could go as far inland as New Orleans if hit. "The only thing we can do at this point is monitor the coast line," said Kendall. "It appears at this time that this particular disturbance, Alex, will pass to the west of the main oil area".

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Environment

Texas' Environmental Agency & The Feds: This Week May Be Crucial

By Chris Vogel, Monday, Jun. 28 2010 @ 1:11PM

Categories: [Environment](#)

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All eyes are on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality this week as its three commissioners will decide whether to grant an air permit to a proposed \$3 billion petroleum coke-fired power plant in Corpus Christi.

The Las Brisas Energy Center has been criticized by health and environmental advocates but heralded by local business and government for the jobs and tax revenue the power plant could generate. Late last year, however, a pair of administrative law judges spent two weeks examining the Las Brisas air permit and recommended that the TCEQ commissioners deny it or send it back for revisions.

In the wake of [last month's decision](#) by the federal Environmental Protection Agency to begin stripping away TCEQ's authority to issue operating permits, saying that the state's permits may be illegal and violate the Clean Air Act, Texas clean-air advocates are describing the commission's decision this week as a litmus test concerning the agency's competency.

TCEQ's "decision could be seen as an example of why these federal actions were necessary unless the commissioners follow the recommendations of their own judges and deny Las Brisas's air permit," said Jen Powis of the Sierra Club.

Sierra Club officials say the administrative law judges found that Las Brisas's permit application did not account for several pollution sources and did not analyze the best technology to use to ensure the lowest possible amount of pollution. If approved, Las Brisas would be the first petroleum coke-fired power plant to be built near a metropolitan city since it has been known that petroleum coke causes more pollution than your everyday coal-fired plant, say clean-air advocates.

"There is so much evidence that this permit does not follow the law," said Tom "Smitty" Smith of Public Citizen, "this permit should be denied. If the commissioners overrule their own hearing officers ... it proves how much they need to be reformed by the ... Texas Legislature. If they approve this permit we'd recommend abolishing the commissioners and replacing them with a rubber stamp."

Still, lawyers for the power plant have reportedly filed documents stating that TCEQ


 This week's decision will be
 watched closely

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cannot legally deny the permit but must give the company a chance to fix whatever issues may exist. Las Brisas officials have said they are confident going into the hearing, which is scheduled for June 30.

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HoustonPress



4. **AIR POLLUTION: EPA toxics standards for cities are 10 years late -- IG** (06/28/2010)

Gabriel Nelson, E&E reporter

More than 10 years after releasing a plan to reduce health risks from toxic emissions in urban areas, U.S. EPA has not followed through with new rules or updated risk assessments for smaller local sources, according to a new report by the agency's inspector general.

Upon the release of the Integrated Urban Air Toxics Strategy in 1999, the agency sounded an alarm about city-dwellers' exposure to emissions from smaller pollution sources such as cars, dry cleaners and gas stations. One in 28,000 Americans could get cancer due to these "area" sources, according to the latest assessment, with about 2 million living in areas where the lifetime risk was 1 in 10,000 or greater.

But while the agency was required to issue new urban emissions standards in 2000, they never came, according to the inspector general's [report](#), which was released last week. EPA's most recent risk assessment is based on data from 2002, and the agency never released an updated report on hotspots with lingering public health problems, as it was told to do when Congress amended the Clean Air Act in 1990.

"About half of the States and several local agencies have laws preventing them from implementing environmental regulations stricter than EPA's regulations," the inspector general concluded. "Without the establishment of a minimum, federally required risk-based program, we do not believe that all state and local agencies will implement programs to adequately address the health risks from urban air toxics."

The program has long drawn criticism from the inspector general and the Government Accountability Office, both of which have issued a string of reports over the past two decades concluding that air toxics have lingered near the bottom of the agency's priority list. According to the most recent GAO [report](#), which was released in 2006, funding constraints had prompted the agency to bump toxics behind the agency's "criteria" air pollutants, which include sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxide (NO_x) and particulate matter (PM).

Jeffrey Holmstead, the agency's air chief under President George W. Bush, said area sources often fell by the wayside while the agency pursued new regulations on toxic emissions from mobile sources and major sources. Funding for air toxics efforts fell by more than 70 percent between fiscal 2001 and 2009, according to the new report.

"There was a feeling that any remaining risk was very small, and with the time and effort it took to go through and do a defensible rulemaking for these area sources, you got very little risk reduction for your effort," Holmstead said. "Of course, the agency tries to meet its statutory mandates as much as it can, but at a certain point, you have so many of them, you have to pick and choose."

Though area sources produce less emissions than major sources, they are "especially badly controlled," Earthjustice attorney Jim Pew said. Small businesses often have greater human health impacts because there are so many of them, he said, compounded by the fact that they are often located in residential neighborhoods rather than industrial parks.

"EPA has been behind on a huge part of the implementation of the Clear Air Act," said Jane Williams, chairwoman of the Sierra Club's toxics task force. "All of this has taken over a decade."

According to the most recent risk assessment, about half of the increased cancer risk attributed to air toxics is linked to two chemicals -- benzene and carbon tetrachloride ([Greenwire](#), June 26, 2009).

Funding has started coming back to the air toxics program, the agency said in its written response to the inspector general's report. The Obama administration requested an \$18.7 million budget increase next year for EPA's air quality and toxics management program, which received \$202.2 million for the current fiscal year.

"Limited resources over the past eight years have impaired our ability to fully implement these programs," the agency said. "For the first time in almost a decade, this year EPA has shifted funds from other programs to help meet regulatory deadlines."

EPA has pledged to issue an updated risk assessment report this summer, this time using emissions data from 2005. The agency plans to submit its report on hotspots to Congress by next summer.

Litigation by environmentalists seems to have prompted the agency to shift its attention to regulation of area sources, Holmstead said. With regulation of greenhouse gases, ground-level ozone and PM 2.5 at the top of the agency's agenda, he said, "there are a number of things that they clearly want to focus on more than these very small sources of air toxics."

EPA said it would meet its court-mandated deadline to issue three separate emissions standards for industrial boilers, institutional and commercial boilers, and sewer sludge incineration. If the agency finalizes those rules by Dec. 16, the inspector general's office said in its response to the agency's comments, it will have met its requirements "a little over 10 years after the original deadline."

Star-Telegram

Let's get Texas back to clean air

Posted Saturday, Jun. 26, 2010

BY LARRY R. SOWARD AND MATTHEW TEJADA

Special to the Star-Telegram

It's not just the hot, humid winds of a Texas summer blowing across the Fort Worth region these days. There are also some wafting breezes of environmental change with frequent gusts of political and bureaucratic rhetoric.

Fanning all that is recent notice from the Environmental Protection Agency that it will no longer look the other way regarding Texas' industry-friendly air-permitting program.

The EPA has instead begun to require certain facilities to apply for permits directly from the federal government, as it is fully authorized by law to do, until the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality makes some significant changes to comply with federal requirements.

Since 1995, the TCEQ has issued air permits under a program that does not have full EPA approval. Though the TCEQ has long been roundly criticized for being lenient in permitting and lax on enforcement, the EPA for many years only meekly raised questions about Texas' programs without taking firm action.

A reinvigorated EPA has clearly signaled a change of tactics.

None of the major players in this drama can escape blame. The EPA allowed decisions on questionable programs to languish for far too long. Texas continued to march to the beat of its own drum, thinking that the federal government would never step in. And industry has taken full advantage of an opaque regulatory structure in hopes that it would be shielded by the state from any corrective action.

After years of extended, extensive and unproductive communications between state and federal regulators, the EPA has been forced to act.

The EPA could require a broad overhaul of the Texas air-permitting program and even issue sanctions against the state. Or the agency could simply nullify state-issued permits. Instead, the EPA has taken the rather measured and limited steps of notifying three large Texas industrial plants that it, instead of the TCEQ, will handle the renewal of their air pollution permits.

We are still only at the beginning of this slow-motion showdown. The EPA is expected to strike down other deficient components of Texas' air permitting program this summer and to continue assuming permitting responsibilities. We can expect the state, industry or both to file every available lawsuit to stall the EPA's actions.

Rather than arguing in the media or fighting in court, both agencies should sit down to dispassionately address and resolve their differences. There is plenty of room to negotiate and compromise if all involved will genuinely work together toward the simple goal of getting Texas compliant with federal laws.

Unfortunate rhetoric like "undue meddling," "pervasive federal intrusion" and "Draconian policies" has done, and will do, little except misstate facts and mislead opinions. The current conflict is not a "form over substance" dispute or "federalism encroaching upon states' rights." It is instead a federal agency telling a state that it must comply with federal laws.

Yes, of all 50 states, only Texas has been singled out in this fashion. That's because only Texas has been found noncompliant with federal air requirements.

Instituting a federally approved permitting program in our state will not cause Texas to lose competitiveness in the marketplace, discourage new industry and jobs or foist higher costs on Texas consumers.

Environmental quality and economic strength are not opposing forces. They are, in fact, intertwined. Together, they provide a clean, healthy place to live and work, with the regulatory clarity needed to maintain economic prosperity and growth.

While bureaucrats fuss, politicians joust, lawyers tangle and PR folks spin, little is accomplished in pursuit of clean air and good health.

Texans continue to be subjected to high ozone levels and harmful air pollutants from Barnett Shale production, power plants, cement kilns and the millions of cars driven every day.

This dispute demands the enthusiastic effort and support of state and federal leaders, government agencies, industry, environmental groups and all Texans alike. The TCEQ should step up and be the leader it can be, working as a true partner with the EPA to correct the permitting deficiencies so we can all get back to the business of cleaning up Texas' air.

Larry R. Soward is a former commissioner of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.



Gulf oil spill through the eyes of children

Updated 8h 48m ago

By Bob Elston



Family photo

Before the kids left, an oiled pelican lands on the beach.

My kids and I had been watching the webcam images of oil gushing from BP's pipe 5,000 feet beneath the sea and a thousand miles from our home. And then my daughter said she wanted to help oiled-up birds, so I seized on that impulse to take my three older children — 12, 11 and 8 — to see up close the largest oil spill in U.S. history.

I pulled them out of their Virginia school for a week this month for what would become a sad and memorable adventure. We averaged 350 miles a day during our drive to the Gulf Coast, slept in a tent, and with each passing day learned about the unfolding tragedy devastating people's livelihoods, the economy and the environment.

For anyone dumbfounded by the staggered response to the spill, the unanswered questions and the seemingly conflicting interests (environment vs. economy) in this multilayered catastrophe, our visit to the region revealed a simple truth evident even to a child: The Gulf Coast's suffering is not only an environmental tragedy but an unmistakably human

one, too.

Glimpsing the future

We saw how the spill split local communities over the need to preserve the environment for fishing and tourism and to continue drilling operations to fuel our collective lifestyle. The trip taught me that it is never too early to expose our young children to complicated societal issues whose stakes will only get higher in the future. We left a lot of the drive to chance — no fixed itinerary or final destination. We reached the Gulf in three days, and immediately picked up clues to the magnitude of the disaster.

On Alabama's Dauphin Island, my kids collected tar balls that locals told us began washing up a day earlier. For each 10-foot stretch of sand, we found two or three. Those harmless-looking globs were enough to drive away tourists and threaten the local economy. Our motel receptionist showed us pages of cancellations that poured in after April 20, the date of the oil rig catastrophe. We also realized our naiveté at thinking we'd see — much less help — oily pelicans. A bird expert I bumped into told me that without any expertise, we might get in the way. Besides, he said, you can't predict how oil spreads. He had just completed a survey of one island in Louisiana that found only four out of more than 1,000 seabirds had any trace of oil. He later got a call that birds drenched in oil were discovered there.

We forged on to Louisiana and met an oil company engineer who advised us to drive to Cocodrie, one

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of the farthest southern points of the bayou. No oil. Before turning around, we talked with a man standing on his home's balcony. There was no oil in the local waterway, he confirmed, yet fishing was banned. Several of his friends were ticketed for fishing anyway. I asked him where fishermen would turn next. He said, "Many are expecting a check from BP." My 12-year-old son listened to this and offered, "People should just sue BP."

My son would have to reconsider after seeing for himself not only how vital the petroleum industry is to the bayou, but also how oil drilling and sensitive ecosystems must coexist. We hooked up with a Cessna pilot in Houma who flies for the oil companies. He took us over the bayou, pointing out drilling operations in the marshes and a factory manufacturing rigs. He estimated that about half the local population worked in oil. He has been flying over these sensitive lands for decades, and he did not hide his dislike for the Obama administration's moratorium on new offshore drilling. He likened it to closing down a freeway because of a traffic accident.

For us, we were about to see the worst of the spill.

A searing image

We drove to Grand Isle a day after President Obama's third visit to the region. The road was dotted with hand-written signs taking aim at the government and BP. Some condemned the spill, while others reassured BP that the locals still love it.

We found the beach at Grand Isle State Park closed but the pier open. Looking out over the [Gulf of Mexico](#), the kids spotted two dolphins and watched majestic pelicans glide over the water. Below our feet, however, we saw horrific pools of petroleum slopping up on the sand. The beach was cut in half by booms extending to the horizon. When the sunlight hit the water, we saw the sheen of the oil.

By that point, we had been out for five days, and it was time to head for home. My daughter pointed out that we had come a long way and not seen an oiled bird. I reassured her that we had seen enough to make the trip worthwhile.

As we walked off the beach, we turned back for a last look at the Gulf. At that moment, we saw cleanup workers pulling out a giant net. An oily pelican had landed about 60 yards away. It leapt into the air,

beat its heavy wings and flew back in the oily water. The sight of an injured bird mustering the strength to evade capture reinforced for the kids the enormity of the tragedy and the difficulty of making things right again — for the wildlife, and for the people.

It was also the image they told me they would never forget.

And with that, we headed home.

Bob Elston is a father of four children in Herndon, Va. He blogs about parenting issues at www.therainracer.wordpress.com.

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Financial Post

News

Leaving oil spill alone might have



Poggy fish lie dead stuck in oil in Bay Jimmy near Port Sulpher, Louisiana June 20, 2010. The BP oil spill has been called one of the largest American history.

Kate Kelland, Health and Science Correspondent, Reuters · Tuesday, Jun. 29, 2010

LONDON -- It might have been better for the environment to have done nothing about the enormous oil spill except to keep the oil out at sea, British scientists said on Monday.

Marine biology and environmental experts said they feared the aggressive cleanup operation, during which oil-dispersing chemicals have been dumped into the sea, might be more damaging than the oil itself.

Previous experience suggests that containing the oil out at sea but otherwise leaving it alone to disperse might be better in the long run but is regarded as politically unacceptable, they said.

"One of the problems with this spill is that it has gone from the environmental arena into the economic is, that depends on which perspective you're coming from," said Martin Preston, an expert in marine po Britain's Liverpool University.

"Economically, clearly the impact has been very large, but environmentally the jury is still out. One of th politics is that politicians cannot be seen to be doing nothing, even though doing nothing is sometimes t

Scientists told the briefing in London that although the Deepwater Horizon rig blowout and explosion, tl up to a major incident, they did not yet constitute an environmental catastrophe.

The U.S. government estimates that up to 60,000 barrels (2.5 million gallons/9.5 million litres) of oil a d; oil well on the seabed about a mile below the surface.

Much of the oil is still far out at sea, but some is starting to drift toward the southern U.S. coast, where hardest hit so far.

BP and the Obama administration have been under pressure from the public to take serious action to cl

Opinion polls have shown that the U.S. public disapproved of BP's response to the spill and grew more s response in the weeks after the accident.

The spreading oil has halted major fisheries and covered wetlands and beaches from Louisiana to Florid of birds and other wildlife soaked in oil.

There have been around 20 major spills of more than 20 million gallons since the 1960s. The largest rec of the Gulf War when between 240 and 460 million gallons were spilled.

The largest previous spill resulting from a rig blowout like that of the Deepwater Horizon was the Ixtoc 1 which continued for 9 months during which more than 140 million gallons of oil was spilled.

The Exxon Valdez accident in Alaska in 1989 spilled around 10 million gallons.

Simon Boxall, an expert at Britain's National Oceanography Center who has helped analyze various majc experiments had been conducted since the Exxon Valdez spill, looking at areas that were left alone, as v mechanically.

"The chemically cleaned up areas have taken the longest to recover and they are still damaged," Mr. Bo actually recovered much quicker."

Some 10,000 people were flown in to deal with the Exxon Valdez spill, and Mr. Boxall said scientists nov that grew up around it caused more environmental damage than the oil itself.

Christoph Gertler of Bangor University, who has been studying various potential bacterial remedies for i Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration suggested that dispersants were "changing the nature of the c more difficult for naturally occurring marine bacteria to break it down.

Mr. Boxall said it was important to remember that oil coming from the BP well was a light crude that was quickly absorbed and disappeared quickly when it came to the surface.

He said there were three golden rules of oil spills:

"The first is don't spill it in the first place: the second is, if you do spill it, try and pick it up as quickly and the third is that in the open ocean, the best thing to do is leave well alone. Unfortunately, politically that's not always the case."

Scientists agreed that the wetlands of Louisiana were the most sensitive areas at risk, but said that here the best solution was to leave them alone.

"The more delicate an area is -- and many of these areas around the Gulf coast are very delicate -- the more likely it is to be damaged by acting," said Mr. Preston. "A rather gung-ho attitude to the cleanup could end up doing more harm than good."

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Posted on Tue, Jun. 29, 2010

Oil spill brings push for wetlands habitat

The Associated Press

The Gulf of Mexico oil spill prompts a new push to quickly increase wetlands habitat for birds migrating toward the Gulf of Mexico.

"More than 50 million migratory birds traveling south in coming months will instinctively head toward the marshes and coastlands of the northern Gulf of Mexico," said Kevin Norton, state conservationist for Louisiana in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"With some marshes and shorelines already degraded and the potential for larger-scale oil impacts in the coming months, it is essential that we provide inland and coastal food, water and cover for migratory birds before they reach the oil-impacted areas," he said Monday.

The conservation service said up to \$20 million is available through three existing programs for farmers, ranchers and other landowners in eight states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas.

They'll have to apply by Aug. 1 to get money to create or enhance areas that will attract waterfowl such as ducks and geese; water birds such as grebes, coots and gulls; shore birds including plovers and sandpipers, and wading birds such as ibis, herons and egrets.

Shallow water, mudflat and sandflat habitats all are needed, a news release said.

"Of special interest are agricultural lands that contain wetlands farmed under natural conditions and prior converted croplands. Rice fields are particularly well-suited for this initiative, as are catfish and crawfish farms," it said.

About \$10 million of the money is through the Wetlands Reserve Program, which provides know-how and money for easements in which landowners protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. It's available in five of the states: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri.

Another \$7 million is through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and \$3 million through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

Online:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

Map: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/wrp_mapweb2.jpg



Biden oil spill visit update: White House releases new details of 2-state trip

Published: Monday, June 28, 2010, 12:41 PM Updated: Monday, June 28, 2010, 7:16 PM

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(AP Photo/Ed Reinke)

Vice President Joe Biden speaks during a visit to the General Electric Co., plant in Louisville, Ky., Monday, June 28, 2010. The White House today announced further details of Biden's Tuesday, June 29, trip to Louisiana and Florida, where he is to review ongoing efforts to clean up oil from the BP Deepwater Horizon spill.

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The White House today announced more details of Tuesday's oil spill tour by Vice President Joe Biden, saying where he will stop in New Orleans and Pensacola.

The White House **previously had said** only that Biden would be coming to the Gulf Coast on Tuesday and that he would visit the command center in New Orleans and "the Florida Panhandle."

Today, the Obama administration said Biden would survey response efforts, visit with coastal residents impacted by the spill and meet with area officials.


The Panhandle stop is to be in Pensacola, where Biden will visit Naval Air Station Pensacola **as President Obama had on June 15**. According to White House officials, however, Biden will be addressing members of the media at 4:30, not giving a speech to military personnel.

While in Pensacola on Tuesday afternoon, Biden will be joined by National Incident Commander Admiral Thad Allen, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco and Gov. Charlie Crist.

In the morning, Biden will visit the Unified Area Command office in New Orleans at 10 a.m. to receive a briefing on response efforts and tour the facility. There he will be joined by Adm. Allen, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, Lubchenco and Gov. Bobby Jindal.


At noon, Biden will visit Pomes Seafood, where he will meet with Gulf Coast residents impacted by the oil spill and is to make a statement to the press.

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June 28, 2010

BP spends \$2.65B on oil spill; denies CEO quitting

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press Writers

BP's mounting costs for capping and cleaning up the Gulf of Mexico spill have reached \$2.65 billion, it said Monday, but the oil giant denied reports out of Russia that CEO Tony Hayward is resigning.

The company's expenses climbed \$100 million per day over the weekend, according to an SEC filing Monday, as engineers eyed a tropical storm headed for the Texas-Mexico border. It was expected to miss the oil spill area but could still generate disruptive waves and winds.

It was a rocky start to the week after BP PLC stock fell 6 percent Friday in New York to a 14-year low. BP has lost more than \$100 billion in market value since the deep-water drilling platform it was operating blew up April 20, killing 11 workers and starting the massive leak that has fouled the coastline in four states.

British-based BP rushed to deny the report by Russia's state RIA Novosti news agency, which said a senior Russian Cabinet official had said Hayward was expected to resign as chief executive.

It quoted Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, before a Moscow meeting with Hayward on Monday, as saying that Hayward would introduce his successor.

"Hayward is leaving his post, he will introduce his successor," Sechin said, according to RIA Novosti.

BP spokeswoman Carolyn Copland in London said the report "is definitely not correct." Sheila Williams, also in London, said, "Tony Hayward remains chief executive."

"They are mistaken," U.S.-based BP spokesman Mark Proegler said of the Russian report.

After the meeting, a spokesman for Sechin said, "The issue of Hayward's resignation wasn't discussed." Spokesman Rustam Kozharov said topics included the Russian joint venture TNK-BP, which accounts for about a quarter of BP's reserves and production.

BP shares gave up some ground in London after the Russian report. But they were still up a fraction at \$4.61. BP's U.S. shares gained about 2.5 percent.

Moscow-based oil analyst Konstantin Cherepanov from the Swiss investment bank UBS said he gave little credence to reports of Hayward's resignation.

"I'm sure there has been a misunderstanding. Hayward's resignation at this time and in this place lacks logic," he said.

"It would make sense that Hayward would finish his job tackling with the oil spill and step down afterwards so that the new CEO wouldn't have his burden on his shoulders."

In a filing Monday to U.S. securities regulators, BP said the cost of its response to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill had reached about \$2.65 billion, up from \$2.35 billion as of Friday. The costs include spill response, containment, relief well drilling, grants to Gulf states, claims paid, and federal costs, but not a \$20 billion fund for Gulf damages the company created this month.

BP said it had received more than 80,000 claims and made almost 41,000 payments, totaling more than \$128 million.

The rig drilling the relief well that's the best hope of stopping the oil spill has made it within about 20 feet horizontally of the blown-out well that's gushing crude, BP Senior Vice President Kent Wells said Monday.

Wells said the rig is going to drill an additional 900 feet down before crews cut in sideways and start pumping in heavy mud to try to stop the flow from the damaged well. It's currently about 16,770 feet down.

Wells says BP is moving extremely cautiously to make sure everything is lined up correctly and the relief well is still on target to be finished by early August. A second well is being drilled as a backup.

"This is the point in time we have to be very good at what we're doing," Wells said.

The work progressed as Tropical Storm Alex, farther southwest over the Gulf, was forecast to strengthen and become a hurricane Tuesday on a course for northeastern Mexico and a neighboring stretch of Texas.

That track is far from the oil spill off Louisiana's coast. But the first tropical storm of what is expected to be an active Atlantic hurricane season will still generate waves up to 15 feet high and winds of 20 to 30 mph on its outer edges that could pound the oil spill area, said Stacy Stewart, senior hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

"That could exacerbate the problem there in terms of pushing oil further inland and also perhaps hindering operations," Stewart said.

Isachenkov and Nataliya Vasilyeva reported from Moscow. Associated Press Writers Harry R. Weber in Houston and Sofia Mannos in Washington also contributed to this report.



FILE - In this June 17, 2010 file photo, BP PLC CEO Tony Hayward testifies before an Energy and Environment Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing on the role of BP in the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill on Capitol Hill in Washington. BP denied its embattled chief executive was resigning as the first tropical storm to hit the Gulf of Mexico this year threatened to disrupt cleanup work on its massive oil spill, even from a distance. (AP Photo/Haraz N. Ghanbari, File)





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Oil spill takes emotional toll similar to that from Katrina

12:00 AM CDT on Monday, June 28, 2010

FROM WIRE REPORTS Janet McConnaughey, Mitch Stacy, The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS – The Gulf of Mexico oil disaster is bringing back feelings that are far too familiar to shrimper Ricky Robin and others still dealing with the physical and emotional toll wrung by Hurricane Katrina five years ago.

"I can't sleep at night. I find myself crying sometimes," said Robin, of Violet, a blue-collar community on the southeastern edge of the New Orleans suburbs.

Psychiatrists who treated people after Katrina and have held group sessions in oil spill-stricken areas say the symptoms showing up are much the same: Anger. Anxiety. Drinking. Depression. Suicidal thoughts.

"Everybody's acting strange," said Robin, 56. "Real angry, frustrated, stressed-out, fighting brothers and sisters and mamas and family."

Fishing families, the backbone of the coastal economy, are especially hard-pressed as the waters that make up their livelihood are sporadically closed because of fears the oil will taint fish, oysters and shrimp.

Oilfield workers, whose salaries are among the best the region can offer, worry about their industry's long-term future.

Social services agencies have not seen a significant increase in people seeking help since the spill began, but that doesn't mean the need isn't there, said Jeffrey Bennett, executive director of the Gulf Coast Mental Health Center in Gulfport, Miss.

"Unfortunately, the people most affected, shrimpers and fishermen, are not people who traditionally seek mental health services," Bennett said. "They're kind of tough characters, and look at being depressed or not being able to handle their own problems as weakness."

On Sunday evening, many in Alabama's coastal fishing community planned to attend services for a popular charter captain who committed suicide on his docked boat.

Mental health services officials in Alabama and Florida said they received several visits or calls from people saying they needed help in the days after the captain's death.

"This is a second round of major trauma for children and families still recovering from Katrina. It represents uncharted territory," said Dr. Irwin Redlener, director of the National Center for Disaster

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GERALD HERBERT/The Associated Press

Charter boat captain
Chet Hebert and his wife, Joanne, listen to their town's mayor discuss assistance options and the BP claims process at a meeting in Lafitte, La.

Preparedness at Columbia University and a member of the National Commission on Children and Disasters who has worked with Katrina survivors.

Janet McConnaughey,

Mitch Stacy,

The Associated Press

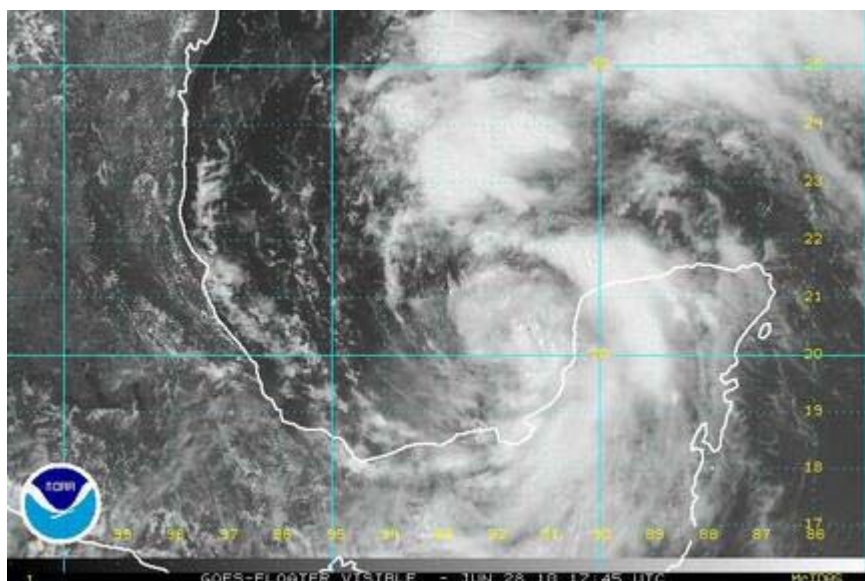


Tropical Storm Alex forecast to strengthen; could push oil toward Gulf Coast

Published: Monday, June 28, 2010, 1:24 PM Updated: Monday, June 28, 2010, 1:27 PM



Wire Service Reports



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(Courtesy NOAA)

Tropical Storm Alex is expected to steer away from the site of the Gulf oil spill, but forecasters say swells from the storm could push the oil spill closer to shore.

Tropical Storm Alex may become a major hurricane as it churns toward the Texas-Mexico border forcing the evacuation of some rigs and sending swells at the oil slick created by the U.S.'s worst spill.

The storm may grow into at least a Category 3 system, with minimum winds of 111 mph (178 kph), before making landfall early July 1, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

The system, with maximum sustained winds of 60 mph, was about 85 miles west of Campeche in Mexico and moving north-northwest at 7 mph, the agency said in an advisory posted on its website just before 11 a.m. Miami time. It is expected to reach hurricane strength of 74 mph tomorrow.

"I expect Alex to grow and intensify significantly over the next 72 hours," said Jim Rouiller, senior energy meteorologist for Planalytics Inc., a weather adviser to energy interests. "It remains entirely possible that Alex could grow into a Category 2 or low-end Category 3 on Wednesday or Thursday."

The U.S. and Mexican governments have issued hurricane watches from just south of Baffin Bay in Texas to La Cruz, Mexico, according to the hurricane center. A watch means storm conditions may develop with 48 hours.

The storm's track keeps it away from a direct hit on the slick of crude oil pouring from a BP Plc rig. However, large ocean swells are already making their way to the site, said Brian LaMarre, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Slidell, Louisiana.

Those waves may push the oil into the Gulf Coast, said Joe Bastardi, chief hurricane forecaster at AccuWeather Inc. in State College, Pa.

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"A hurricane is like a giant plunger and the waves radiate out," Bastardi said. "Some big swells are coming out and pushing oil to the coast and there isn't anything anyone can do about it."

The Gulf of Mexico measures about 500 miles from north to south between the Mississippi River delta and the Yucatan, and about 1,000 miles west to east, according to the website of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation in Corpus Christi, Texas.

It is home to about 30 percent of U.S. oil and 12 percent of its natural gas production. It also has seven of the 10 busiest U.S. ports, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Petroleos Mexicanos, the state-owned company also known as Pemex, closed oil export terminals Cayo Arcas and Dos Bocas as Alex bore down on the area. Pemex, Latin America's largest oil producer, extracts about 73 percent of its oil from Gulf fields, producing 2.593 million barrels a day in May.

Mexico is the second-largest crude provider to the U.S. after Canada. Pemex is operating all of its rigs and said they will remain open as the storm passes.

BP Plc and Royal Dutch Shell Plc, the biggest oil producers in the Gulf, are evacuating crews from five offshore platforms in the western Gulf as a safety precaution.

The Gulf Coast region is also home to about half of U.S. refining capacity, according to the Energy Department.

"It can take two or three days to safely shut a refinery in advance of a storm," said Bill Day, a spokesman for Valero Energy Corp., which operates five refineries in Texas and one in Louisiana. "You're not just flipping a switch and walking away. You have to be prepared."

Gulf Coast refiners in August and September 2008 lost about 20 percent of daily production capacity due to hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

Bastardi said the next two days will be critical in determining where Alex will make landfall.

"It is going to be like a fork in the road," he said. "If it misses the fork it will go into Mexico; if it makes it, it will go north," Bastardi said.

Rouiller said some models suggest landfall from anywhere on the Texas coast just south of Galveston to Padre Island.

"I would suggest preparing for the worst case scenario from Corpus Christi to Brownsville, Texas," Rouiller said.

(This report was written by Brian K. Sullivan of Bloomberg.)

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BP oil spill reaches another US state

Updated 9 hours 5 minutes ago

Large patches of thick oil from the BP Gulf of Mexico spill in the United States have washed ashore for the first time in the state of Mississippi.

The news comes as BP raises its spill cost so far to \$US2.65 billion (\$3 billion), an increase of about \$US300 million (\$344 million) over the weekend.

Oil had previously only come ashore in Alabama, Florida and the hardest hit state, Louisiana.

Hundreds of globs of brown oil began washing ashore Mississippi tourist beaches at Ocean Springs and fishing hot spots on Sunday.

Local residents are outraged authorities have not been able to stem the flow of the disaster, sparked almost 10 weeks ago when an explosion ripped through the Deepwater Horizon rig, killing 11 workers.

"This might be the last time we are able to come to the beach," Ocean Springs residents James Vogeney said.

"What makes us so mad about all of this is that it could have been avoided. All of it."

Another resident, Mike Hollings, says he cried when he saw the oil start to wash ashore at the beach.

"Life as I know it is over. What are we going to do if nobody cares to act fast enough," he said.

Wildlife officials have picked up one pelican covered in oil and one dead turtle.

However, local residents have expressed their anger that the authorities have not yet begun an extensive clean-up of the oil.

Mississippi state officials says they are waiting for BP contractors to start cleaning up before beginning coordinated work.

Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality spokesman Earl Etheridge says they expect more oil to arrive before clean-up crews start their work.



Oil had previously only come ashore in Alabama, Florida and the hardest hit state, Louisiana. (US Coast Guard: Petty Officer 3rd Class Ann Marie Gorden)

"We cannot clean up or catch the oil until BP gets here. They have all of our people," he said.

"We want to clean this up now. Maybe this will amp up BP's effort, but we can't do anything because they have all the money."

Later, a reporter visited seven oil-affected beaches and saw only one clean-up crew at work.

Efforts to contain and clean up oil from the massive spill that began on April 20 are being handled jointly by federal, state and local officials and funded by BP, leading to frustration among people whose coastlines are most at risk.

The costs for BP are rising sharply on a daily basis. On Friday local time the bill stood at \$US2.35 billion.

That works out at about \$US4 million an hour on the basis that the figures were given three days apart.

But these figures are a drop in the ocean compared to the billions of dollars wiped off its market value.

Despite desperate efforts, BP is still not capping all of the 35,000 to 60,000 barrels of oil estimated to be spilling into the sea every day, saying it is managing to contain about 25,000 barrels daily.

- Reuters

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First posted 9 hours 21 minutes ago

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Mousse patties begin washing up on Front Beach

Published: Monday, June 28, 2010, 12:35 PM Updated: Monday, June 28, 2010, 12:36 PM



Gareth Clary



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(Joshua Dahl, Correspondent)

Oil washed up on Front Beach on Monday, June 28, 2010.

OCEAN SPRINGS, Miss. -- Tar patties from the Gulf oil spill starting washing ashore Front Beach around noon

on Monday, a day after the oil first made landfall on the Mississippi mainland in Jackson County.

Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran and four aldermen were on the scene with emergency officials, evaluating the latest discovery of oil on the shore.

Some of the oil globs were washing around some of the X-Tex fencing that has been in place as part of a pilot program of the oil-absorbing fabric.

(This story will be updated with further developments.)

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Texas prepares for effects from oil spill

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By Ken Paxton, State Representative

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Last week, Governor Rick Perry announced that Texas is prepared to respond to any effects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill along the Texas coast. The State Operations Center has remained at an increased readiness level and the State continues to work with federal and local authorities to track the spill and prepare contingency plans.

The Office of the Governor participates in daily conference calls with the White House, Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and gulf state governors.

Any oil reaching Texas shores is expected to be in the form of weathered tar balls, which are naturally occurring on the Texas Gulf Coast during the summer months, according to the information from the General Land Office and Coast Guard. Fortunately, Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson has equipped and trained his staff in preparation for a potential spill off the Texas coast. Texas' General Land Office (GLO) has five coastal offices equipped with boats, 4x4 trucks, trailers, ATVs, and skimmers available for response activities. Silt curtains may be deployed to protect washouts.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has activated 12 Mobile Response Spill Assessment Teams capable of conducting air monitoring and collecting sediment and water samples. TCEQ also has staff available to advise on waste disposal and provide training in shoreline clean-up techniques.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is coordinating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, TCEQ and GLO to provide any assistance necessary. TPWD has also formed an internal oil spill response team and is conducting weekly conference calls with the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Texas Sea Grant College Program and commercial fisheries. No fisheries have been closed along the Texas coast due to the oil spill. TDA is working with grocery stores to promote consumer awareness that both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Texas Department of State Health Services have affirmed the health and safety of Texas seafood and shrimp.

The Oil Spill Prevention and Response Division of the General Land Office was created in 1991 to prevent oil spills and to ensure platforms, pipeline operators, vessels and refineries have contingency plans in place to respond to spills. Division personnel audit and inspect over 625 facilities that store, transport or refine petroleum products along the Texas coast to check for compliance with applicable regulations. The Division also maintains records on more than 18,000 vessels that operate in state water to ensure they have operational guidelines and procedures in place to deal with oil spills.

Officials with the U.S. Coast Guard Houston-Galveston, Port Arthur, Corpus Christi and the GLO will continue regular communication to coordinate activities on the federal, state and local level.

Texas beaches remain open for summer recreation and business. For more information, please visit www.traveltex.com.

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Everything New Orleans

Head of BP's Gulf oil spill response has survived trials

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The Associated Press

He has been cast in the role of fixer, sent in to clean up after BP's gaffe-prone chief executive and oversee efforts to contain the **Gulf of Mexico oil gusher**. But **Robert Dudley** is really more of a diplomat.



The Associated Press

During a June 23 tour of the Audubon Nature Institute's turtle rehabilitation center in New Orleans, BP CEO Bob Dudley, center, watches Dr. Robert MacLean, senior veterinarian of the Audubon Nature Institute, left, and Michele Kelley, the institute's stranding coordinator handle a sea turtle rescued from oily Gulf waters.

In his first week running the spill response for BP, Dudley shuttled between the Gulf and Washington, defended BP engineers after a setback, toured a center where oil-covered turtles are treated and enlisted the help of a politically connected relief expert.

"Until we close the well off," he acknowledged at one point, "I think there's a period here where it's going to be very difficult to restore BP's reputation." Dudley added he was confident the well would be plugged by the end of August.

He picked his words carefully and stressed that he understands the public outrage toward the company. He

mentioned growing up in Mississippi and spending summers on the Gulf. It was vintage Dudley, according to acquaintances: steady and methodical.

"He's not real emotional," said Don Stacy, who was chairman of Amoco's Russian operations and Dudley's boss in the 1990s. "He doesn't frighten people. He stays calm and analyzes problems."

The 54-year-old managing director faces no shortage of problems as he takes command from Tony Hayward, the British CEO who angered Americans by minimizing the spill's environmental impact and expressing his exasperation by saying, "I'd like my life back."

Dudley's task is not just logistical -- capping the well and directing the cleanup. He must repair the less tangible damage, too, soothing angry people along the Gulf and at least starting to salvage BP's reputation.

"His mission is restoring BP's image in the Americas," said Mark Gilman, an analyst for The Benchmark Co. who has known Dudley since the 1990s. "This is almost form over substance. BP needs to start looking good."

Dudley got a quick idea of just how difficult that will be. On his first day on the job, an undersea robot bumped the cap being used to contain the gusher, forcing BP engineers to remove the cap and then scramble to reattach it.

At a briefing with reporters the next day in Washington, Dudley said rig workers did "exactly the right thing" and learned from the incident. Dudley was in Washington to meet Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and other top administration officials to discuss the rate of oil flowing from the broken well and BP's use of chemicals to break down oil plumes.

Dudley said he expects to split his time between the Gulf, Houston and Washington -- a sign that dealing with regulators will be an important part of the job. Already there are calls in Washington to subject BP to extra scrutiny before letting the company drill again in the United States.

Notably, Dudley asked James Lee Witt to review BP's response to the disaster and offer recommendations. Witt is well-known to regulators in Washington and Louisiana; he was director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency during the Clinton administration and worked for the state of Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

Arjen Boin, a Louisiana State professor who wrote a book on crisis management, said enlisting Witt, a southerner from neighboring Arkansas, was a wise move. But he said BP must do more to win over governors, regulators and local officials in the Gulf states, some of whom have been more strident than the feds in their criticism of the company.

Dudley has experience dealing with combative regulators and difficult partners.

In the 1990s, he ran Amoco's operations in Russia before BP bought the company in 1998. Stacy, the retired Amoco executive, says Dudley was instrumental in persuading Russian investors to let Amoco have an equity stake. The Russians didn't know much about capitalism, and Dudley, he said, "knew how to educate them without lecturing."

Later, at BP, Dudley oversaw exploration and production in Russia, the Caspian region, Angola, Algeria and Egypt. In 2003, BP tapped him to run TNK-BP, a joint venture with a group of Russian billionaires.

The venture was enormously successful, but the Russian partners eventually pushed for more control -- and Dudley's removal. Russian government officials raided the venture's offices, denied work permits to dozens of foreign workers and forced Dudley to leave the country in 2008.

"My strong view is that the conflict wasn't aimed at Bob, but rather against the British partner," said Peter Necarsulmer, CEO of The PBN Co., which BP hired as consultants in Russia. "Bob was the ham in that sandwich."

BP and its partners eventually settled their differences, and the venture still makes money for BP. Back in London, Dudley got a board seat and oversight of BP's operations in Asia and the Americas.

Dudley was supposed to take charge of the spill response only after the well was plugged. But the switch was moved up after two key events in Washington -- a June 16 meeting between President Barack Obama and Dudley, Hayward and BP Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg; and Hayward's disastrous appearance the next day before a congressional panel, where the CEO came across as uninformed and uncooperative.

Dudley hasn't agreed to every interview request -- BP denied one for this story -- but he has been more accessible and relaxed around reporters than Hayward. Last week, when a scheduled 45 minutes with reporters was up, Dudley kept talking, ignoring aides who were trying to shoo him out the door.

But echoing Hayward, Dudley says it's too early to know what caused the April 20 rig explosion that killed 11 workers and triggered an environmental disaster. He said he hasn't been involved in the search to explain the accident, adding, "I haven't read even our internal investigation."

Dudley staunchly defends BP's actions since the blowout. He said he hopes the world will someday recognize BP's "incredible response" to the spill.

Analysts say if Dudley can manage the well-capping and the cleanup, he could replace Hayward as CEO. BP officials spent Monday swatting down a report out of Russia that Hayward would resign soon.

People who know Dudley say he is flexible when problems arise.

Aleksey Knizhnikov, an energy policy official in Russia for the World Wildlife Fund, said that while he ran

TNK-BP Dudley listened to activists and agreed to delay seismic testing and reroute a gas pipeline for environmental reasons.

John Hofmeister, former president of Shell Oil and author of "Why We Hate the Oil Companies," said he talked to Dudley recently to urge the use of supertankers to capture more of the oil spewing from the broken well. Dudley said BP's engineers would study the idea.

"Bob is well-respected in the industry because he's open to ideas, and that's what BP needs right now," Hofmeister said.

Christine Tiscareno, an oil industry analyst in London for Standard & Poor's who has met Dudley, said his background makes him well-suited for the new job and to replace Hayward as the public face of BP in the United States.

"He is used to working under very, very stressful circumstances," she said, "but more than that, he's an American."

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Everything New Orleans

Got a fix for the Gulf oil spill? It may be worth a prize

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The Associated Press

You might be able to get rich quick if you can fix the **BP oil spill**.



BP image

The **X Prize Foundation** wants to make fixing the BP oil spill a multimillion dollar competition. It has done the same for space, fuel efficient cars and gene-mapping.

Foundation Vice President Francis Beland says his group is kicking around the idea. They've already received 35,000 unsolicited ideas for fixing the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Beland told a special oil spill conference Monday that his group is seeking advice from the public on how to handle such a competition. The foundation also has to raise money for a prize.

X Prizes are usually \$10 million or more.

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Ex-FEMA director could help BP out of its disaster

By EILEEN SULLIVAN (AP) – 8 hours ago

WASHINGTON — James Lee Witt, America's go-to guy for disaster response, knows how to take an unpopular organization and turn it around. If BP hires the former Federal Emergency Management Agency director to help with community relations, it could further a makeover of the oil giant's Gulf Coast image.

Last week, the company's British CEO, Tony Hayward, stepped down from managing the day-to-day operations of the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history. Hayward handed off the job to managing director Bob Dudley, a Mississippi native.

On Friday, BP and Witt's company were still hammering out the details of a contract. Dudley told reporters he asked Witt to go down to New Orleans with him to get some feedback on the company's response and what it could do in the future.

"As long as they get the job done, we don't care who they hire," said Kyle Plotkin, spokesman for Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal.

A Dudley-Witt duo could be harder for Gulf Coast officials to criticize. For years Witt's consulting firm has been working with governments in that region to help with disaster planning and recovery.

"When James Lee Witt does something, people listen and respect it," said Bev Ciglar, a public policy professor at Penn State University. "I'm very, very surprised that he has not been more involved."

President Bill Clinton appointed Witt as FEMA director in 1993. At the time, the agency was considered one of the worst in the government after its poor responses to hurricanes Hugo and Andrew in 1989 and 1992. After Hugo thrashed South Carolina, the state's Democratic senator, Ernest Hollings, called FEMA "the sorriest bunch of bureaucratic jackasses I've ever worked with."

That reputation changed under Witt, partly because of the new image he brought to the agency. In 1994, Witt made news simply by flying to the scene of a disaster the day it occurred.

Earlier this month, Witt told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette that the Obama administration responded to the BP oil spill quickly. "They've got some of the smartest minds in the business coming up with solutions, but it seems to be going at a snail's pace," Witt said.

One of Witt's most valuable skills is his ability to talk about disasters, the people affected and how to help them, said George Haddow, who worked for Witt during the Clinton administration and is now a research scientist and adjunct professor at George Washington University's Institute of Crisis, Disaster and Risk Management.

"James Lee Witt knows a lot about how you communicate about disasters," Haddow said.

BP could use some help in that department. Officials estimate more than 100 million gallons of oil have leaked from the rig since the April 20 explosion.

The oil company executives' gaffes have angered Americans, particularly when Hayward said, "No one wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back."

Former Arkansas Sen. David Pryor said he called Vice President Joe Biden's office about a month ago to ask whether the Obama administration had reached out to Witt for assistance.

"I was mystified why he was not brought into the picture sooner, and frankly, I was frustrated about it," Pryor said.

As president-elect, Barack Obama sought Witt's guidance on homeland security and disaster response issues. FEMA's reputation had suffered a relapse after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 when the Bush administration was slow and unprepared to respond.

James Lee Witt Associates is already working with Escambia and Okaloosa counties in Florida on their response to the BP oil spill, a company spokeswoman said.

Associated Press writer Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, La., contributed to this report.

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AP Associated Press



FILE - In this file photo taken June 16, 2010, BP Chief Executive Officer Tony Hayward, left, and BP Managing Director Bob Dudley, right, arrive with other BP executives at the White House in Washington. BP PLC said Wednesday, June 23, 2010, that Bob Dudley has been appointed to head the new Gulf Coast Restoration Organization, which is in charge of cleaning up the oil spill. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, file)

Map



How Much Has Spilled, and How Far? Seeking Answers as Questions Mount

Saturday, June 26, 2010

By THE NEW YORK TIMES, The New York Times

Since the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in April, killing 11 and setting off the biggest maritime oil spill in the nation's history, questions about the potential dimensions of the disaster have only multiplied from week to week. Readers have been asking whether the oil can be contained, how serious the damage will be and what they can do to help. Following is a primer on the spill.

The Oil's Reach

Q. How far has the oil advanced along the Gulf Coast? How far could it travel, and what variables are at play? Have any communities been bypassed and spared?

A. So far, oil has made landfall along hundreds of miles of the Gulf Coast, from Freshwater Bayou in the middle of Louisiana's coastline, all the way to the Florida panhandle to just outside Panama City. The impact has not been uniform; some areas have been greatly affected, while others have been spared. For example, Mississippi's mainland coast, excepting its barrier islands, has been largely untouched by heavy oil, though that appears likely to change in the next few days.

The oil, either in the form of tar balls, sheen or heavier "mousse," is brought near the coast by currents, but the wind is usually responsible for the final push, bringing streams of oil onshore. Coast Guard officials frequently describe the oil as a series of spills rather than one big slick, and that is reflected in the impact: oil is heading in all directions at the same time.

Shoreline trajectories, based on currents and wind patterns, are only dependable for roughly 72 hours. But scientists using computer models at the National Center for Atmospheric Research have suggested that the oil reaching the loop current in the Gulf of Mexico could come around Florida's southern tip within weeks.

After that, the modeling indicates, it would travel up the Atlantic Seaboard to North Carolina's Outer Banks, before joining the Gulf Stream and heading east across the Atlantic toward Europe. They caution, however, that this is not a forecast but merely a possibility, and that it is unclear how much the oil would dissipate as it traveled in these currents.

Q. How much oil has spilled so far?

A. The exact rate at which oil is leaking from the well is not known. Although estimates of the flow rate have changed drastically -- to 35,000 to 60,000 barrels a day now, from 1,000 barrels a day originally -- it is also not known if the actual rate has changed in the two months since the gusher began.

Calculating the spill to date using the current estimate, and factoring in the approximately 365,000 barrels collected so far from the wellhead, results in a total of about 1.9 million to 3.5 million barrels, or about 80 million to 150 million gallons since the rig exploded on April 20.

By contrast, the Exxon Valdez spill off Alaska in 1989 released an estimated 10.8 million gallons of oil.

Plugging the Well

Q. How might BP plug the leak?

A. BP has tried a lot of methods to seal the well or contain the leak and until recently did not have much success. On June 3, however, technicians succeeded in cutting the riser -- the large pipe that connected the well at the seafloor to the drilling rig and that collapsed when the rig sank -- and two days later lowered a containment cap on it.

Although the cap did not make a perfect seal, it collected about 15,000 barrels of oil a day.

In normal operation, the oil collected by the cap travels up a pipe to a drill ship, the Discoverer Enterprise, where it is stored and later loaded onto a tanker before heading to a refinery. Natural gas is separated from the oil and burned on a long boom extending from ships.

On June 16, a second system began operating, in which oil is collected through a pipe at the base of the blowout preventer,

the stack of safety valves at the top of the well on the seafloor. The oil flows up to a drill rig, the Q4000, where both the oil and the gas it contains are burned using special equipment that produces far less soot than open-air burning of oil.

Q. Is there a sure long-term fix for the spill? When could that happen, best case and worst case?

A. Drilling experts say that two relief wells being drilled near the site of the blowout are the ultimate solution to stopping the gusher. Relief wells have been used to "kill" runaway wells in the past, and the basic procedure is straightforward.

The relief well is drilled at an angle to intersect the damaged well just above the oil reservoir -- in this case, about 18,000 feet below sea level. Then heavy drilling mud is pumped down the relief well into the runaway well. As more and more mud is pumped in, it builds up a column of mud that produces enough downward force to counteract the upward pressure of the gas and oil, stopping the leak. Cement is then pumped into the well to entomb it permanently.

Only one relief well should be needed, but BP is drilling a second in case anything goes wrong with the first. Both wells should be completed by late July or August, although they could be delayed. The wells have to find a seven-inch steel pipe that forms part of the runaway well, and although they have plenty of high-tech tools and data-gathering equipment to do that, there is no guarantee they will succeed on the first try.

Mechanical problems or bad weather could also delay the work. A hurricane or other severe storm could also push back completion dates by a week or more, as the drilling rigs would have to shut down and move to a safe location. Bad weather would also affect the containment operation, as all the other vessels at the site of the blowout would have to depart and the well would be left uncapped until the storm had passed.

Q. Doomsday scenarios described online suggest that the pipe that lines the well is deteriorating, or that there may be other problems with the well that may cause it to fail completely, leaving an utterly uncontrolled gusher that could prove difficult or impossible to control. Is this true?

A. There is a lot of speculation about the condition of the well, but it is not really possible to know what kind of shape it is in. BP suggested that one reason that a procedure called the "top kill" failed was because there may have been damage to the well lining about 1,000 feet down. But no one knows for sure.

What does seem clear is that there is enough concern about not making the situation worse that BP is now pursuing only the containment option at the top of the well. They have abandoned efforts to permanently plug the well from the top because that would build up pressure that might cause damage. The well will be permanently sealed starting from the bottom, using one or both relief wells.

The Cleaning Crew

Q. Who is in charge of stopping the oil that is already spilled from spreading and reaching the gulf shoreline?

A. The Coast Guard, led by Adm. Thad W. Allen, has been designated the lead agency. In practice, day-to-day decisions are made jointly by Coast Guard personnel and their BP counterparts. At the spill response center in Venice, La., BP officials or contractors in charge of a certain task -- setting cleanup priorities, for instance, or allocating resources like containment boom -- are matched with Coast Guard officials with the same responsibility. One Coast Guard petty officer described the division of authority in percentage terms: "It's 51-49, and we're the 51."

A unified command center has opened in New Orleans and incident command posts operate in Houma, La., Mobile, Ala., and Miami. Satellite posts exist elsewhere along the coast in places like Port Fourchon, La. and Venice, La.

Q. How many people are working on the response, and what are they doing?

A. Some 36,000 people are involved, according to the Deepwater Horizon Response Web site overseen by BP. A BP official said that included 1,185 Coast Guard personnel, 1,282 National Guardsmen and 667 BP officials. But the bulk of the personnel -- a total of nearly 31,000 -- work for contractors hired by BP, ranging from United States Environmental Services, based in New Orleans, to O'Brien's Response Management in Houston.

Out on the waters around the broken well, some 27 vessels with 230 crew members and support personnel are burning oil. Some 14,500 people are serving as mariners, crew members or captains on 2,680 "vessels of opportunity" recruited for the cleanup. Some are skimming oil -- either at sea, from specialized skimming vessels, or closer to shore with so-called "drum" skimmers, cylinders with surfaces that attract oil, which is then squeezed off as the drum spins.

Others are laying "hard" vinyl boom and soft absorbent boom -- more than 475 miles of it -- to protect the marshes and beaches.

The State of Louisiana has enlisted National Guardsmen to install 1.6 miles of welded-mesh steel barriers on one coastline; the goal is to cover eight miles. The guardsmen are also deploying cylindrical "tiger dams" on Grand Isle.

The state-sponsored construction of sand berms was started in two places off Louisiana's fragile barrier islands and wetlands to keep the oil at bay, state officials say. But a dispute between state and federal authorities over where it is safe to dredge halted one project this week after 690,000 cubic yards of dredged material had been made available for berms.

In addition to the engineers and cleanup workers, more than 500 federal and state wildlife specialists are working on rescuing oiled animals and oiled habitat, said a BP spokesman, John Curry. That does not include an undetermined number of staff members and wildlife experts from nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups.

Q. How are vessels assigned to work in various areas of the spill?

A. The captains of these so-called vessels of opportunity register with the joint command and are assigned to work in a lottery, with the number picked on any given day based on regional need, said Michael R. Abendhoff, BP's director of government and public affairs. "We're focusing on getting fishermen to work in an area they know," he said.

Dispersant

Q. Is BP using anything to break up the oil?

A. BP has used large amounts of chemical dispersant in an attempt to reduce the damage caused by oil coming from the broken well. To date, it has sprayed 977,000 gallons of dispersant on the gulf's surface as well as applied 501,000 gallons to the leak, the company says. It is the largest volume of dispersants ever applied to a spill in United States waters.

Dispersants are detergent-like compounds that cause the oil to break up into tiny droplets, which sink below the surface and can be "dispersed" by sea currents. Until now, dispersants were always applied to oil on the surface; the deepwater application is a first.

Q. Could the chemicals themselves pose any environmental risks?

A. Although concentrated dispersant is mildly to moderately toxic, the notion is that the diluted dispersant is less toxic than the concentrated oil it treats. And it is far less toxic when diluted in the vast volume of the seas.

But the use of such large volumes of dispersant, and its application in a novel setting like the wellhead, constitute an experiment of epic proportions. So far, officials from the Environmental Protection Agency say they have seen no ill effect from the chemicals.

BP has used dispersants from the Corexit line of products, a source of some controversy; their use has been banned in Britain because of risks they pose to marine life along rocky coasts. Weeks ago, the E.P.A. instructed BP to identify and start using a newer, less toxic dispersant. BP did not do so, arguing that Corexit products were the best available and that there was no gold standard for evaluating the toxicity of dispersants.

Dispersant use peaked in late May. On May 26, the E.P.A. and Coast Guard instructed BP to significantly reduce the amount of dispersant it was applying to the Gulf, and it has since done so.

Environmental Impact

Q. Has wildlife taken a hard hit? How many animals have been killed?

A. Oil is toxic to many forms of wildlife, and the spill is surely killing or harming untold numbers of creatures at sea and on land. That said, calculating the number of fatalities specifically attributed to the oil may be nigh impossible. Every day, federal officials release a count of dead and impaired animals that they have found along the gulf beaches since the spill began. Nearly 2,000 birds, 550 sea turtles and dozens of marine mammals have been counted.

But that tally is far from a reliable measure. For starters, it is not clear that most of those animals were killed by oil. In fact, many of the dead animals were not even visibly oiled. And many were so decomposed by the time they were spotted that postmortems will never be done.

But if the count is way off, it is probably an undercount. Most animals, particularly sea creatures, live far from where humans spot them. For every bird found covered by petroleum muck on a beach, there are untold others who simply die on an secluded beach. For every dolphin that washes ashore, there is another that sinks at sea, and so on.

It is also virtually certain that fish larvae, which are exquisitely sensitive to oil, are dying by the millions as well.

Q. Have any endangered species been put at risk?

A. Yes, the gulf is home to many animals officially listed as endangered, the highest level of vulnerability, under the federal Endangered Species Act. The largest among the permanent marine residents are sperm whales, which like to feed right at the mouth of the Mississippi and have been spotted in the slick. Numerous endangered species of sea turtles, including Kemp ridleys, live almost entirely within the Gulf of Mexico, as does the bulbous West Indian manatee. On land, the federal Department of Fish and Wildlife lists 17 endangered species on the beaches of Florida alone, including four different species of beach mice. Some of these species you have probably never heard of, like the Florida perforate cladonia, a type of lichen, but others are quite well known, like the majestic whooping crane, only hundreds of which are thought to survive in the wild.

Q. Are coral reefs in the gulf and in the Florida Keys in danger?

A. Scientists are definitely worried about the reefs, but the ones at greatest risk appear to be deep reefs relatively near the gushing well. Because the well is so deep, some toxins that would rise to the surface and evaporate in a shallow oil spill are instead dissolving into the water. The worry is that they may kill or weaken deepwater marine organisms. But even relatively near the well, the concentrations of these toxins in deep water are relatively low, so there is reason to hope for the best.

As for risk to the coral reefs in the Florida Keys, scientific opinion is not unanimous, but most researchers have said that if any oil gets pulled into currents that take it past the Keys, it would probably be so diluted by then that it would pose little risk to organisms.

Q. Has the damage to Louisiana's marshes and estuaries been severe?

A. Obviously, if you talk to locals, they will give you an earful about the oil that has seeped into their local marshes and how the government is not doing nearly enough to protect this delicate resource.

However, as ugly as any oil spill is, it is unclear at this point just how deep into the marshes the worst of the oil has penetrated. As this changes on an almost daily basis, firsthand observation is the best source of information. For an overview, check out the interactive map at www.geoplatform.gov/gulfresponse.

Of course, the wild card here is a hurricane. A large surge of water could carry the water deep into the inner marshes, which for wildlife could mean an even nastier game change.

Q. Is gulf seafood safe to eat?

A. Yes, experts say. Health scientists and politicians have been hammering home this message since the spill, all the way up to President Obama, who ate local crab cakes and shrimp salad sandwiches on television during a trip to Gulfport, Miss. The federal government says the seafood is being tested for dangerous chemicals by federal scientists from the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Food and Drug Administration.

Mainly they are looking for a chemical called a polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon, which is a leading indicator of oil contamination. So far, all levels are safe. This is largely because the federal government closed large swaths of the gulf to fishers, shrimpers and oystermen.

Not that much seafood, speaking relatively, comes from there anyway: The gulf supplies only 2 percent of the nation's seafood, while 83 percent is imported. Still, wary seafood eaters aren't taking any chances, causing prices across the country to rise for fish and shrimp. So, the real thing to avoid, experts say, is an overpriced meal.

Economic Impact

Q. What will the economic impact of the spill be?

A. The final costs of the spill are difficult to predict. For now, as images of oil-coated wildlife on Louisiana's islands fill the news, most parts of coastal Mississippi and Alabama have seen only intermittent tar balls, but the states are suffering the same blows to their fishing and tourism industries.

In May, Nathaniel Karp, chief economist for the Alabama bank BBVA Compass, projected eventual losses for the four gulf states at \$4.3 billion, including \$191 million in losses to Alabama. This month he raised that projection to \$11.5 billion.

In Louisiana, seafood and tourism generate \$2.4 billion a year and \$8.3 billion, respectively, according to officials associated with the two industries.

The moratorium that President Obama imposed on offshore oil drilling could also have a big economic impact and has been fought fiercely by political figures at every level in Louisiana. They argue that it would essentially be another economic hit

to the state, already reeling from the fishing closures and other economic dislocation related to the spill. (A federal judge in New Orleans this week struck down the administration's moratorium; the administration said it would appeal.)

The ban would take 33 floating rigs out of commission for six months; like many rigs in the gulf, all of these employ workers from Louisiana and are supplied by companies from Louisiana. The Louisiana State University Center for Energy Studies calculated that the moratorium would result directly in the loss of 3,339 jobs, and another 7,656 indirectly.

State officials are concerned about the ripple effects throughout the economy, including lost tax revenue. They are also worried about how long it would take for drilling to resume after the end of the moratorium.

Louisianans of all political stripes are generally advocates of offshore drilling, even after this disastrous spill. But many feel that the state should reap more of the benefits, whether by taking a percentage of the royalties that the oil companies pay to the federal government or receiving money from the companies outright to rebuild and restore the state's coastal wetlands.

In Alabama and Mississippi, many beaches remain open, and the oil for the moment seems to be moving east, away from them. On good days it is difficult to see any evidence of the spill -- except for the empty beaches, the idle fishermen and seafood processors, and the worry and anger on the brows here.

But tourist bookings in Alabama and Mississippi are down 40 to 75 percent, with cancellations accelerating as the summer begins, say hotels, condominium owners and real estate agents. Researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi estimated the state's tourism losses at \$119 million for May through August.

With federal and some state fishing waters closed, a seafood business that had hoped to recover this season from a series of cold years and the lingering effects of Hurricane Katrina has been brought to its knees. In Bayou la Batre, the center of Alabama's seafood industry, a food bank has been giving out 10,000 pounds of food a week -- a grim anomaly in a town where residents had always counted on the sea to feed them.

Florida looks especially vulnerable -- partly because it is such a large state with an economy as tied to its coastline as Detroit's is to automobiles. Tourism is Florida's biggest industry, generating about \$60 billion a year, and the Gulf Coast counties alone stand to lose \$11 billion and 200,000 jobs if visitor numbers decline 50 percent, according to a recent study from the University of South Florida.

But that might be a conservative estimate. Even without oil on beaches in South Florida, hotels in Miami are reporting that bookings are down as families cancel trips because of uncertainty about where the spill will show up. Charter fishermen from Panama City to the Keys are already reporting that advance bookings are nonexistent, and as long as the spill churns in the gulf, this will be the case. Who wants to book a vacation when the loop current in the gulf could shift direction and send oil around Florida and up the East Coast?

And that's just tourism. Since the 1950s, Florida's population has become increasingly concentrated by the coast. Millions of homes and condos already devalued by the recession and foreclosure crisis could face further downward pressure on prices because of the spill. State and local budgets that depend on the sales tax -- Florida has no state income tax -- may have to be cut even further, adding to an unemployment rate that already hovers around 12 percent.

But here's the comparison that really scares Floridians: Moody's recently found the spill could do more damage to the state's economy than the 2004 hurricane season -- when four large storms slammed the state -- and more damage than the global recession, which has already brought Florida to its knees.

Political Fallout

Q. Will the spill help generate support for energy and climate legislation now before the Senate? (Will promoters of renewable energy like wind and solar benefit from this new evidence of the dangers of fossil fuels?)

A. President Obama and some Democratic leaders hope that the gulf disaster will build public and political support for a bill to tighten oil drilling regulations, reduce dependence on imported oil and limit emissions of gases contributing to global warming. There is likely to be a debate in the Senate in July on some new oil drilling rules and incentives for energy conservation. There may be movement toward new subsidies for clean energy sources like wind, solar and biofuels.

But there is little evidence of growing support for a more ambitious effort to address climate change by putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions or creating a cap-and-trade style market for pollution permits. Deep divisions remain within the Democratic Party over climate change, and they are unlikely to be bridged in the busy weeks that Congress has left before breaking for the fall election season.

Q. What federal agencies have regulatory oversight over offshore drilling? Will any heads roll at a cabinet or agency level

because of the spill?

A. In some respects, offshore work has been overseen by a patchwork of federal bodies, including the Coast Guard, which regulates the seaworthiness of oceangoing rigs, and the Environmental Protection Agency, which reviews drilling plans for the potential impact on marine life and the surrounding ecosystem.

But the principal agency charged with oversight of offshore drilling is -- or was -- the Minerals Management Service, a division of the Interior Department formed in 1982. Among other responsibilities, the agency was charged with leasing oil and gas formations in the Gulf of Mexico, approving driller permits and plans, monitoring the safety of offshore drilling operations and -- in what quickly drew allegations of conflict of interest after the Deepwater Horizon explosion -- collecting royalties from oil companies doing work in federal waters.

Since the accident, the downside of vesting one regulatory division with all of those disparate responsibilities has been brought into stark relief.

Documents have revealed, for example, that the agency sidestepped rules requiring it to obtain other federal permits before allowing BP -- and dozens of other oil companies -- to drill in areas that might harm endangered species or other marine mammals. Current and former scientists of the agency have also stated that they were routinely overruled when they raised concerns about the safety and environmental impact of certain drilling proposals.

And investigators have also charged that the minerals service was lax in approving drilling proposals -- including those developed by BP for the Deepwater Horizon -- despite lacking any realistic plan to respond to a blowout of the magnitude now polluting the gulf.

Of course, the precise combination of factors leading to the unchecked gusher is still being sorted out -- including what measure of blame will be assigned to BP, to human error and to a failure of federal oversight.

Nonetheless, in an effort to dissolve a relationship between industry and regulators that many critics say had become far too cozy and permissive, the Obama administration announced plans to break up the Minerals Management Service on May 11. The idea is to divide the agency into three parts -- one responsible for leasing, another for fee collections and a separate division for environmental oversight.

The agency also gets a new name: the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement. Michael R. Bromwich, a former Justice Department inspector general under the Clinton administration, was named last week to head it up.

He succeeds the most prominent official to depart in connection with the gulf disaster: S. Elizabeth Birnbaum, the former director of the minerals service, who resigned on May 27. Mr. Obama suggested that Ms. Birnbaum had failed to change her troubled agency with "sufficient urgency."

Mr. Bromwich told a Senate panel on Wednesday that he would create an investigative unit to root out corruption and speed reorganization of the office.

Liability

Q. Is anyone investigating what caused the spill? Is there any mechanism for prosecution, should wrongdoing be discovered?

A. This accident will be the most closely studied domestic event since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. A formal Marine Board investigation has been under way since shortly after the April 20 explosion, jointly conducted by the United States Coast Guard and the Interior Department's Minerals Management Service, the agency responsible for policing offshore drilling.

President Obama has appointed a seven-member commission to study the accident and make recommendations on strengthening regulation, led by William K. Reilly, a former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Bob Graham, a former governor and senator from Florida.

Many congressional committees are looking into various aspects of the explosion and leak; among the most aggressive are the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The Justice Department has dispatched civil and criminal investigators to the Gulf Coast to determine whether damage suits or criminal charges can be brought.

The National Academy of Engineering is looking into the technical failures that contributed to the disaster. BP is carrying out an internal investigation into the causes of the blast. The American Petroleum Institute and other industry groups are

conducting their own inquiries to determine whether BP followed accepted industry practices, or if those practices need to be changed.

Q. Who is legally liable for the effects of the oil spill?

A. Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, BP, the owner of the well, has been named the "responsible party" and bears the brunt of liability for the spill. That means the company must foot the bill for the cleanup efforts and pay claims for economic damage, as well as penalties under the law. Other companies involved with the well could find themselves drawn into litigation.

Q. Has BP paid out any claims to people who have suffered from the spill? How much so far?

A. From the beginning of the disaster, BP has said it will pay all "legitimate claims" of economic loss related to the spill and so far has paid out more than \$100 million. It has issued more than 31,000 checks since the accident to residents along the Gulf Coast. It has received 64,000 claims and says it has a claims team of 1,000 working on claims at 33 field offices.

Q. Is there any law limiting the damages paid out by an oil company?

A. The Oil Pollution Act sets the liability limit for economic damage claims at \$75 million, but BP blew past that number long ago and has said it will pay all legitimate claims. Last week, BP and the White House announced that the company was creating a \$20 billion fund to take over payment of economic damage claims. The fund will be run independently by Kenneth R. Feinberg, who also administered the settlement fund for 9/11 victims and others.

Q. Have any lawsuits been filed against BP or other parties?

A. More than 200 lawsuits have been filed against BP and other companies -- and some of those suits are class actions involving hundreds and even thousands of plaintiffs. Commercial fishermen, shrimpers, vacation home rental agents, dive shop owners, seafood processors, state and local agencies and anyone whose income could be affected by the spill are weighing in.

Whether they continue to pursue their claims in court or opt for the more predictable settlement from Mr. Feinberg's fund is one of the issues we will all be watching.

Q. How in the world will the courts deal with all of those lawsuits?

A. The suits are likely to be consolidated by the federal courts through a process called multidistrict litigation. A seven-judge panel appointed by the chief justice of the Supreme Court of the United States meets regularly to determine which cases should be consolidated and how.

The industry has asked that the cases be consolidated in Houston; the companies' headquarters are there, and, not coincidentally, it might be a relatively friendly environment. The various lawyers for the plaintiffs have requested that the cases be consolidated across the Gulf Coast, with the Louisiana trial bar pushing hard for New Orleans -- not coincidentally, a place where anger over the spill runs high.

BP and the Oil Industry

Q. Is BP wealthy enough to pay for the economic and environmental costs of the spill? Or is the company at risk financially?

A. The price of BP stock has plummeted by more than 50 percent since the April 20 accident, from just over \$60 a share to below \$30. But BP remains a very wealthy company; last year alone it earned \$17 billion, and it ended the year with more than \$8 billion in cash. It has operations all over the world that generate income, and with oil at over \$75 a barrel, the prospects for revenues remain strong.

Most experts believe the company will survive, despite anticipated losses from penalties and claims mounting to tens of billions of dollars.

Still, uncertainties remain, especially if the runaway well is not plugged by the two relief wells now being drilled, which was expected to be completed by late August. That could mean months more of heavy damages, and more and more claims.

Q. Who owns BP stock? Mostly Britons?

A. BP is owned by investors all over the world. BP estimates that about 40 percent of their shares are owned by British investors, and nearly as much by American investors. Another 10 percent are owned by other Europeans, and the remaining 10 percent by investors from other countries outside Europe. Since much of the stock is owned by mutual funds, it is not

easy to determine the exact percentages of the nationalities of its owners. Suffice it to say, many Americans and Britons depend on BP dividends.

Q. Are lots of ordinary people whose mutual or pension funds are invested in BP going to be adversely affected? Or are most such funds widely diversified?

A. There are certainly some mutual funds and pension funds that will be affected on both sides of the Atlantic. Nebraska's retirement fund, for instance, reportedly will lose \$1.3 million each quarter that BP suspends its dividend. The erasure of about \$100 billion in BP stock value has translated into big losses for several funds. The California Public Employees' Retirement system has lost more than \$284 million in value, Bloomberg News reported.

Q. Will other oil companies benefit from BP's woes, or will they all be negatively affected?

A. Some companies may benefit in the future. When companies decide to invest in big projects, they often look for partners to share risks and expenses. BP may be seen now as less reliable, giving a new competitive edge to Exxon Mobil and Chevron, for instance, when smaller companies like Anadarko are looking for a partner with deep pockets.

But at the moment BP's woes are shared widely, especially among companies that would like to drill more in the Gulf of Mexico. The current drilling moratorium will hurt the majors and service companies. Oil companies will almost certainly face more regulatory hurdles and safety expenses in the future.

Q. Will the spill or the offshore drilling moratorium affect oil or gas prices?

A. The moratorium on drilling in the gulf should not have an impact on oil or gasoline prices over the short term. For one thing, a well that is being drilled is not a producing well; each drilling operation takes a year or more before production commences. For another, oil production is still high in the gulf by historical standards as a result of a wave of drilling in recent years.

Oil is a world commodity, and its price is affected by many factors including the strength of the world economy, which drives demand. However, if the moratorium were to go on for years, it would eventually have an impact on oil supplies as older wells became less productive. That could affect prices, unless lost production is replaced by new production somewhere else.

Philanthropy

Q. Is any organization coordinating charitable donations?

A. Several Web sites are compiling places to donate money, time and resources. The Greater New Orleans Foundation is focused on charities that help fishermen and their families in Louisiana. The National Wildlife Foundation and the Humane Society of the United States are taking donations to help wildlife on the coast.

Perspective

Q. Is this the nation's worst oil disaster ever? Its worst environmental disaster ever?

A. It is probably neither. If your criterion for the worst oil disaster is the greatest volume of oil leaked, then the Lakeview Gusher of 1910 released at least twice as much oil into a semi-desert area of California as this leak has released so far. This leak is without question the worst oil disaster at sea in United States history, but it does not yet match the volume of an Mexican oil-well blowout known as Ixtoc 1, also in the gulf, in 1979-80.

As for worst environmental disaster ever, this one so far does not come close to matching the human impact of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, which prompted one of the largest mass migrations in American history, with perhaps a half-million people abandoning the Plains. But that said, the damage is accumulating as the spill drags on. It seems likely to wind up as one of the worst American environmental disasters, if not the worst.

Reported by Felicity Barringer, John M. Broder, Robbie Brown, Damien Cave, Henry Fountain, Justin Gillis, Leslie Kaufman, Clifford Krauss, John Leland, Campbell Robertson, Elisabeth Rosenthal, John Schwartz and Tom Zeller Jr.

This article originally appeared in [The New York Times](#).

Washington correspondent Daniel Malloy writes the "Pittsburgh On The Potomac" blog exclusively at [PG+](#), a members-only web site of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Our [introduction to PG+](#) gives you all the details.





2. GULF SPILL: Tighter-fitting cap could stop leak ahead of relief well (06/28/2010)

Katie Howell, E&E reporter

BP PLC and federal officials are considering a tighter-fitting cap that could kill the leaking well in the Gulf of Mexico before a relief well intercepts it in August, a top BP official said today.

Crews could shut in the ruptured well with the new sealing cap if pressure and other conditions are right, Kent Wells, BP's senior vice president of exploration and production, told reporters today during a technical briefing. But the company still has a "much greater chance of killing the well from the bottom than the top," he said.

Federal scientists are slated to meet Wednesday with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Energy Secretary Steven Chu to decide whether to move forward with the tighter-sealing cap, a move that would require removing the current cap that has successfully captured and funneled crude to the surface since early June. But Wells indicated today that a decision had already been made. The new cap would give containment vessels on the surface greater flexibility during hurricane season.

"Yes, the plan is, once we have that free-standing riser in place, to move forward with putting this flange connection on," Wells said.

Oil-spill responders had their first scare of hurricane season this weekend as Tropical Storm Alex moved into the Gulf. The storm headed across the west side of the Gulf, away from the flotilla of vessels containing and cleaning up the massive spill, but it could still cause headaches for spill responders.

One headache would be delaying installation of the new sealing cap, Wells said.

The next step in the containment effort involves hooking a third containment vessel, the *Helix Producer*, to the ruptured well through a free-standing riser. Once that vessel is online and has been tested for several days, crews could begin to dismantle the sheared-off riser pipe and install the new sealing cap. But hooking up the *Helix Producer* requires three days of good weather and calm seas, Wells said, something that won't likely occur on the eastern side of a tropical storm.

"On the east side of the hurricane, it will create waves," Wells said. "Over the next six to seven days, we expect sea heights from 3 to 4 feet up to perhaps 10 to 12 feet. It will restrict our ability to do these operations."

But the waves won't hinder relief well drilling efforts, which are making good progress, Wells said. The first relief well is now within 20 horizontal feet of the wellbore, but it still needs to drill down another 900 feet before intercepting the failed Macondo well and shutting it down. Doing so will require taking precise measurements frequently, and BP has not moved up its early August timeline for interception.

"Things have gone very well with the well," he said. "Now we're in that precision part. We will be doing everything we can to kill this well as soon as we can."

BP denies Hayward is resigning

BP today denied Russian reports that embattled CEO Tony Hayward is resigning.

The company rushed to defend Hayward after Russia's state news agency reported that Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin had said Hayward was expected to resign as chief executive.

Hayward was in Russia today to meet with top officials on the Kremlin's concerns about the company's local operations in the wake of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster.

"Hayward is leaving his post; he will introduce his successor," Sechin told RIA Novosti, the Russian news service.

But BP spokespersons in London said the report "is definitely not correct," and "Tony Hayward remains chief executive."

Oil washes ashore in Miss.

Mississippi became the fourth coastal state to fall victim to the encroaching oil slick this weekend as oil was spotted in at least two areas along the coastline.

A state emergency management official said tar balls and a patch of oil were spotted in two places in Jackson County. And another official said additional patches of oil sheen were spotted in the water during aerial flights yesterday.

More oil has been finding its way into Mississippi's waters and barrier islands recently. Louisiana, Alabama and Florida have all seen oil wash ashore already.

More calls to lift the moratorium

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce today issued separate pleas to Obama administration officials to lift the six-month moratorium on deepwater offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Abdalla Salem El Badri, secretary-general of the 12-member oil cartel, said offshore drilling is an important source of oil and any ban would be too hasty, as the causes of the Gulf spill are still unclear.

"We should not really ban it, and we should not jump to conclusions," he told reporters after a meeting in Brussels, the Associated Press reported. "I'm sure that the U.S. government is in limbo because they don't know what's going on in their operation and that's why they stopped their operation in the offshore."

"We hope it will not take long and we hope they will relook at their decision," he added.

Separately, the Chamber of Commerce stepped up its efforts to persuade the administration to lift the ban, saying the six-month standstill would have a devastating effect on coastal economies.

"We must avoid snap decisions following the spill that would threaten U.S. energy security and harm our economy," said Karen Harbert, president and CEO of the chamber's Institute for 21st Century Energy, in a statement. "Ending this moratorium while redoubling our focus on safety will ensure that we have the American energy, jobs, and growth needed to rebuild the Gulf region and ensure a competitive 21st-century economy."

Palin blasts Obama; La. restricts spill info; Fla. tries new protection methods

Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin (R) fired up a crowd in Texas this weekend by criticizing Obama's handling of the oil spill.

"You asked for the job, Mister President, so buck up," Palin said to a packed convention center in Tyler, Texas.

Palin criticized the federal government for being too slow in helping spill victims and said there were too many regulations in allowing residents to begin cleaning up oiled shorelines.

Meanwhile in Louisiana, Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) vetoed a bill out of the state Legislature that would have required his office and executive branch agencies to grant public access to state records related to the spill response.

The governor said he opposed the bill because it "could impact the state's legal position" by allowing BP or other parties with potential liability to obtain information from state agencies.

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist (I) yesterday announced two new BP-funded efforts to keep crude off the state's shores.

One method will use three to nine barges configured like a boom across Destin Pass to funnel oil to an area where it can be skimmed.

The second effort would involve creating an underwater "air curtain" of bubbles that would push oil to the surface.

The projects are expected to cost about \$500,000, which will be paid by BP.

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With oil spill hurting supplies, U.S. seafood suppliers look overseas for shrimp

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AP The Associated Press



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(AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

Thai customers shop around local shrimp at Siam Paragon shopping center in Bangkok on Monday June 28, 2010. With the Gulf Coast oil spill continuing to gush, U.S. seafood suppliers are turning to Asia to ensure Americans have enough shrimp for their gumbos, Creoles and kebabs this summer, but some of those overseas cupboards are low themselves.

HANOI, Vietnam -- As the Gulf Coast oil spill continues to gush, U.S. seafood suppliers are turning to Asia to ensure Americans have enough shrimp for their gumbos, Creoles and cocktails this summer, but some of those overseas cupboards are low themselves.

Several countries in the world's top shrimp-producing region are struggling to satisfy their own appetites for shrimp because of disease, drought and the economic crisis. The oil spill is one more factor driving prices skyward, sending a worldwide ripple through an already tight shrimp market.

The price of plump black tiger shrimp is at a 10-year high in Vietnam, selling for around \$13.50 per kilogram (\$6.14 per pound), said Bui Dung, a manager at Minh Phu, Vietnam's biggest shrimp exporter in the southern Mekong delta province of Ca Mau. He said heat waves along with disease outbreaks have led to smaller yields on farms. Domestic consumption has remained high, nibbling away at cold stocks normally available for export prior to August harvests.

"The demand, particularly from the U.S., is huge," Dung said. "We receive order requests from U.S. importers almost everyday, but we cannot meet all their demands."

Americans have an insatiable craving for shrimp, eating about 4 pounds (1.8 kilograms) a year. And while wild Gulf shrimp provides only about 7 to 9 percent of that supply, the oil spill will likely send some U.S. restaurants and super markets into a short-term frenzy, said Fatima Ferdouse, chief of trade promotion at Infofish, an intergovernmental organization for the Asia-Pacific fishery industry based in Malaysia.

"It backfired because in the American market, they planned to sell ... this much domestic shrimp from the Gulf for summer, which they're not getting now," she said by phone. "So they have to fill in the gap. They panic and then the easy way to get it is to go through import -- they don't have any other choice."

According to Infofish, wholesale shrimp prices have risen by about 15 to 20 percent since a BP-operated oil rig exploded 10 weeks ago, causing an undersea blowout that has spewed millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf.

Gavin Gibbons, a spokesman for the U.S.-based National Fisheries Institute, a trade group, said Americans might see a price increase on their plates in the short term, but he's hopeful Asian production will pick back up to keep consumers from feeling a prolonged pinch.

"It's the No. 1 most consumed seafood in America," he said. "People eat more shrimp than they do canned tuna."

Ecuador is the only country among the top five U.S. importers located outside of Asia. More than a third of the nearly 550,000 tons of shrimp imported by the U.S. last year came from Thailand, the top shipper, according to Infofish.

Thailand has remained a stable supplier, largely unaffected by a virus that has crippled stocks in Bangladesh and Indonesia, the second top supplier to the U.S. last year. For the January-April period before the Gulf oil spill, U.S. imports of Indonesia shrimp were down 30 percent from a year earlier. Imports from Thailand were up about 17 percent over the same period, Infofish data reported.

Last year was the first time the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimated a drop in worldwide shrimp aquaculture production, following the global economic crisis which forced many farmers out of business. But now, prior to the peak summer shrimp-eating season, it's a sellers' market.

Larger shrimp are in short supply, pushing prices to the highest level in two years, according to Infofish. Demand for the black tiger shrimp, which is very popular in Japan, has been particularly high, with prices increasing \$1 a pound (\$ 0.50 a kilogram) since early June.

"The demand worldwide is quite strong. The economic crisis seems to be over, especially the U.S. and Japanese markets are really demanding a lot of shrimp," said Helga Josupeit, a fishery industry officer at GLOBEFISH, an FAO program in Rome that tracks international fish trade and publishes price reports. "If anyone wants to invest in a shrimp farm, they probably will make some money."

Some farmers say it's ironic that the U.S. is now forced to lean more on overseas suppliers to help meet demand. In 2004, the same Gulf Coast shrimpers affected by the oil spill successfully lobbied Washington to slap antidumping tariffs on Vietnam, Thailand, India, Ecuador, Brazil and China, accusing them of flooding the U.S. market with artificially low priced shrimp.

"It's good to see U.S. shrimp importers are coming back to Vietnam," said farmer Nguyen Tat Thang. "But I care more about how much profit I earn from the farm, which I am not seeing increase because of rising production costs."

(Associated Press Writer Margie Mason wrote this report, with a contribution from Tran Van Minh in Hanoi.)

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OSO OSEGUERA: JUNE 28, 2010

Gulf Shrimp Oil-Tainted? Grow Them in the Pacific

BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico will impact the shrimp sector, but an alternative way to cultivate large, tasty and less expensive shrimp may be emerging.

BP's oil spill in the Gulf and an already-tight global shrimp market have stimulated shrimp prices. Shrimp, which ranks among the world's most valuable seafood, is a favorite among U.S. consumers. More than half the shrimp consumed worldwide is farmed, with the majority being cultivated in Asia and Latin America, a market valued at \$20 billion per year.

But before ordering a shrimp cocktail, consider shrimp history. According to Dr. Stephen Levitt, author of the books **Freakonomics** and **Superfreakonomics**, between 1980 and 2005 annual shrimp consumption in the U.S. nearly tripled, from 1.4 pounds to 4.1 pounds per person.

Louisiana leads in providing wild-caught shrimp, with a market share valued at \$2.9 billion per year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (**NOAA**). However, since the oil spill, Louisiana shrimp production is down 30%, according to the **Louisiana Seafood Promotion & Marketing Board**.

U.S. shrimp farmers must meet stricter environmental standards than other countries, making U.S.-farmed shrimp a "Best Choice" or "Good Alternative" to U.S. consumers, while imported shrimp are listed as "Avoid," according to the classification system devised by the **Monterey Bay Aquarium**.

The California institution is concerned about how large areas of tropical coastal mangrove forests in Asia have been destroyed to build shrimp farms. Mangroves are an important habitat for a diverse community of fish, invertebrates and birds. Loss of habitat has had devastating impacts on local artisanal fisheries that many communities previously relied upon for food.

Environmental impacts vary widely from farm to farm and country to country. "Independent certification schemes for shrimp farms are still at a very early stage of development," according to the Monterey Bay Aquarium website.

In addition, the supply chain is complex, comprising ~400,000 farmed-shrimp producers worldwide, numerous independent processing plants, multiple distributors that import the product and thousands of large retailers and restaurant chains that buy directly from distributors.

In general, domestic wild shrimp, representing ~10% of all shrimp consumed in the U.S. (about 75% of which hail from the Gulf of Mexico), is considered significantly more sustainable than farmed shrimp. Yet some NGOs claim that wild shrimping in the U.S. poses a bycatch danger to other species such as large fish and sea turtles. Until now, 90% of shrimp consumed in the United States have been farmed imports.

Problems and solutions

On his website, Levitt notes that rising demand and fishery depletion have caused a rapid increase in shrimp farming, which now provides over half of all shrimp consumed. However, farm-raised shrimp have inferior flavor, poor texture and pale color. Moreover, farm productivity is reduced by disease, such as white spot, and production scalability is limited due to environmental contamination and habitat destruction.

There are different approaches that can be used to solve this problem.

Consider **Aquapods**, in which hundreds of individual triangular, recycled-polyethylene panels are covered with steel wire mesh and joined together to form a geodesic sphere. Each Aquapod has a volume of 957,000 gallons and a diameter of 64 feet. The structures are placed several kilometers from shore in waters around 200 feet deep, where they are protected from storms that would destroy floating pens. The pods also provide protection from predators that breach conventional net pens.

Another alternative may be found in the methods devised by **Texas AgriLife Research**. One scientist in Corpus Christi believes he has achieved a new world record in shrimp production, using an environmentally-friendly system that requires no water exchange throughout the growing cycle. The new system, called a 'super-intensive raceway system,' has taken five years to develop and could revive a U.S. shrimp-farming industry that has been decimated over the years by cheaper foreign imports.

"This grow-out system could be built near large cities to serve niche markets of consumers willing to pay premium prices for tasty, fresh, never-frozen shrimp," said Dr. Tzachi Samocha, a Regents Fellow and professor at the AgriLife Research Mariculture Laboratory in Corpus Christi. "Diners could pick shrimp out of a restaurant tank, much as they do with lobsters," he added. The new system is also a greener way to grow shrimp because its water is never released into the environment. The downside: it uses a lot of water and is expensive.

Another aquafarm option is the method devised by **Aonori Aquafarms, Inc.** (AAI, also known as **Sinaloa Seafields**), a bi-national startup whose proprietary, patented technology reproduces the natural marine habitat of shrimp. Crustaceans are fed on Aonori (**Ulva clathrata**), a high-protein macro-alga (the one sometimes used to roll sushi). The "[f]lavor, coloration and texture are superior to farmed shrimp, [and are] comparable to wild-caught," said Armando León, CEO of Aonori Aquafarms.

AAI is running tests and raising money for a pilot program to demonstrate its innovation. The bi-national team, led by Benjamin Moll, Ph.D., the key inventor of the technology, patented the low-cost, high-yield Aonori pond-culture method that not only delivers low production costs but also provides in-pond pollution remediation and healthier shrimp.

"With little or no dependence on marine resources, no pollution, no habitat destruction, no bycatch, and no damage to sea bottoms, this is simply a better way to provide shrimp. In addition, it produces a high value co-product," explained León. He added: "AAI's shrimp-culture method produces top-quality shrimp, sustainably grown at significantly lower cost."

This method also significantly lowers cost due to decreased feed cost (at least 45% reduction), higher growth rate (60% increase), and much lower risk of disease during production.

Bigger shrimp

AAI has expertise in algae and shrimp culture, reflected in proprietary technology in the form of patents and trade secrets. León's company has been refining the idea and managing the economic and entrepreneurial factors since 1995.

AAI has two key patents, and three more that support their business model. AAI's algae-culture technology lets them grow **Ulva clathrata** with high productivity and low cost. For example, they promise five times the number of tons per acre per year (dry weight) and almost 10 times less cost per dry ton as can be achieved using other methods. The algae and the ecology that AAI supports serve as the major feed source for shrimp, and provide nutritional benefits that result in faster growth and much greater disease resistance than conventional shrimp culture.

The patented method developed by AAI, which asked to keep the process private, avoids the regulatory and supply issues that trouble the wild-caught shrimp industry, such as the ban on shrimp imports from the Gulf of California due to the failure to control bycatch and the expected after-effects of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. A further benefit of AAI's technology is that it makes shrimp culture practical on the Pacific side of Baja California, using clean oceanic waters in an area isolated from other shrimp farms.

AAI Shrimp/Ulva co-culture is environmentally benign. Like other farming methods, it avoids the problems of over-fishing, bycatch and any damage to the environment at the bottom of the pond. In addition, this new technique avoids the three main environmental problems of conventional farming methods: mangrove destruction, water pollution, and excessive demand for fish meal.

How does this method solve these problems? Conventional shrimp farms require substantial water exchange to maintain water quality, taking in clean water and flushing out microalgae and bacteria, as well as mineral nutrients such as nitrogen (as ammonia, which is toxic, and nitrate), plus phosphate. Water quality stays high for extended periods and water exchange is required mainly for salinity control. In the absence of fertilization, nutrients are depleted rapidly, within two to three days, so when water discharge occurs, it can be done when nutrient content is low. This is good practice both from an environmental and an economic viewpoint.

In AAI's experience, biochemical oxygen demand of discharged water from Ulva ponds is lower than the intake water demand, so water pollution is not a problem if ponds are managed correctly. A large fraction of the nutritional needs of the shrimp are supplied by the Ulva and the microfauna it supports. "How much depends on local and seasonal conditions and stocking density," Leon explained, "so we may use supplemental feed in some phases of production. We prefer low-cost feed intended as a supplement for microfauna, with the great majority of protein supplied by Ulva, but some conventional shrimp feed may be used. The amount of balanced feed, will be much lower than in conventional shrimp farming, hence decreased demand on fisheries for fish meal."

"AAI shrimp will be sustainably grown, in the sense that farm construction and operation will not damage the environment. In addition, if energy costs rise or fossil-fuel use is restricted, our

reduced water exchange needs and high fertilizer-use efficiency will deliver a greater relative production-cost advantage compared to conventional shrimp farms. Our method does not fit current designations of 'organic' but easily qualifies as sustainable (green label) under the rules laid out, for example, by the Blue Ocean Institute."

Co-production of Aonori, usable for producing nori for sushi and other products that take advantage of its flavor and exceptional nutritional values, will result in considerable additional income and more efficient use of capital.

AAI plans to open a facility in San Quintín, Baja California, in Mexico. This region has an optimal climate for marine agriculture/aquaculture, pristine ocean water, and affordable land, and is close to U.S. markets, thus reducing transportation costs.

AAI also plans to raise money that will be used to start with a relatively small operation consisting of 36 ponds, to establish the company in the marketplace, and to train personnel. The startup has established a collaboration agreement with one of the largest independent developers of new food and beverage products in the United States to create a successful 'Prime Shrimp' brand. This retailer has the know-how to turn products into viable commercial businesses.

However, problems not only inspire solutions, but sometimes create more problems. The Southern Shrimp Alliance, which represents the American warm-water shrimp industry, is concerned about "the decision by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to allow undersea use of chemical dispersants, further endangering the already beleaguered Gulf of Mexico commercial fisheries," according to **a statement** (PDF) posted on their web page.

The impact of BP's efforts to stop the oil slick in the Gulf could destroy the crustaceans' larvae. Nobody yet knows the impact of BP's attempted solutions and how many years it could take to recover the Gulf's commercial fishing industry.

3. GULF SPILL: U.S. plans 'extraordinary measures' to rescue turtles (06/28/2010)

Noelle Straub, E&E reporter

About 50,000 sea turtle eggs from beaches in the Florida Panhandle and Alabama will be dug up and moved to Florida's Atlantic Coast in hopes of keeping the hatchlings alive in the face of the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

Without the unprecedented intervention, federal scientists say, most, if not all, the hatchlings this year would be at high risk of encountering oil and dying.

"These extraordinary measures and associated risks are not supportable under normal conditions," the federal plan says. "However, the continuing environmental disaster occurring in the Gulf of Mexico requires that we take extraordinary measures to prevent the loss of the entire 2010 cohort of hatchlings produced on Northern Gulf beaches."

The plan calls for relocating the roughly 700 sea turtle nests laid annually in the Florida Panhandle and up to 80 in Alabama. Most are loggerhead nests, but they also include some Kemp's ridley, green and leatherback turtles.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recommended that the nests be collected near the end of incubation and taken to Florida's Atlantic Coast for final incubation and release. Hatchlings begin emerging from nests in early to mid-July.



A sea turtle nest is roped off at Gulf Islands National Seashore in Florida as a boat contracted by BP for oil response chugs along offshore. Photo by Noelle Straub.

The agencies acknowledge that moving such a large number of nests late in incubation has never been attempted and that more hatchlings than natural will die. But they say the effort will give the largest number of hatchlings the best opportunity to survive and contribute to the ongoing recovery of their species.

Currently, sea turtle nest surveyors each morning search the northern Gulf of Mexico beach for new nests, which they spot by the distinctive pattern left in the sand by turtles that come ashore briefly to lay eggs and then head back to sea. Each nest is marked off to ensure it won't be harmed by oil cleanup operations on the beaches. The surveyors log the nest with the date and GPS coordinates.

"Permitted nest surveyors have been in the field locating and marking nests daily since the start of the nesting season," Sandy MacPherson, FWS's national sea turtle coordinator, said in a statement. "Data on the nest location and the date deposited are being closely tracked. This allows us certainty in timing the nest collection phase of the plan."

Eggs will be allowed to incubate at Gulf beaches until day 51, 52 or 53 of incubation. Collecting the eggs at a late point in the incubation cycle, which lasts on average 60 days, means that transporting them is less likely to harm them.

The eggs will be excavated by hand by a designated sea turtle permit holder or permitted contractor, put into Styrofoam boxes and flown to Florida's Atlantic Coast. There, they will be held in a "secure facility" at an off-beach location for the remainder of incubation.

As the hatchlings emerge, they will be collected each night and released on Atlantic Coast beaches, with the exact locations still to be determined, and allowed to make their way to the ocean.

The agencies chose Florida's eastern coast in part because some of the Gulf hatchlings will end up being transported to the Atlantic Ocean anyway by the Gulf Stream, so they do not expect a one-time move to upset the genetic identities of the sea turtle populations. And given the uncertainty about how much oil will remain in the Gulf of Mexico, a release anywhere in the Gulf might put the hatchlings in harm's way, they said.

The agencies said they have sufficient resources to carry out the plan. "However, the implementation of this plan requires a significant coordinated effort by all agencies and partners over an approximately four month period that must be sustained to accomplish the goals," they said.

Nests from southwestern Florida beaches will not be moved. Based on the projected path of the oil spill and the movement of hatchlings from nests in southwestern Florida, the crude is not likely to result in the loss of all hatchlings this year, the agencies said. And the loggerhead turtles that hatch on southwestern Florida beaches are part of a larger subpopulation that also nests on Florida's Atlantic Coast, they said.

The relocation won't be done in future years or in other areas, the plan says.

Gulf Islands National Seashore and Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge each have about 30 sea turtle nests a year. Officials from each area said in interviews about a week ago that the number of nests was a little below average for this time of year, but that it is too early in the season to know whether the numbers have been affected by the oil spill ([Greenwire](#), June 21).

[Click here](#) to read the sea turtle plan.

[Click here](#) to read frequently asked questions about the plan.

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Greenwire

5. **WILDLIFE:** Scientists debate value of cleaning oiled birds (06/28/2010)

Patrick Reis and Noelle Straub, E&E reporters

With contractors for BP PLC cleaning crude-soaked birds along the Gulf Coast, some scientists are questioning whether the bird rehabilitation effort is doing more good for wildlife or for BP's battered image.

"Companies that are responsible for oil spills derive a public relations benefit worth millions of dollars from cleaning oiled birds," Brian Sharp, a ornithologist from Portland, Ore., wrote on his website. "These efforts mislead the public to think that the damage to habitat and wildlife caused by oil can be 'fixed' when any fix is at best limited, and can make things even worse."

Most cleaned birds, including pelicans, die after they are released because of damage done to their lungs, livers and circulatory systems by breathed and swallowed oil, Sharp said.

"Oiled feathers can be cleaned, but internal physiological damage is usually ineffective," Sharp wrote, "and it is very clear from studies that most oiled birds that are cleaned and released (except African penguins) are too sick to survive, and should be added to the number of mortalities for damage purposes."

Studying the survival of cleansed guillemots, a northern seabird, for a [paper](#) published in the journal *Ibis* in 1996, Sharp found a post-release life expectancy of 9.6 days.

In a study of brown pelicans that were exposed to oil after a Southern California spill in 1990, University of California, Davis, scientists also emerged pessimistic about the conservation value of cleaning projects. None of the 112 birds they tracked after release were found to have rejoined breeding colonies.

"We conclude that oil and/or rescue and treatment result in long-term injury to brown pelicans, and that current efforts do not restore them to breeding condition or normal survivability," the researchers wrote in their paper, published in the journal *Marine Pollution Bulletin* in 1996.

Jay Holcomb, director of the International Bird Rescue Research Center, which BP hired to clean birds in the Gulf of Mexico, disputed criticism of the cleaning efforts in a recent post on his website.

"These 'experts' are quoted and their opinions, no matter how ill researched or biased they are, become controversial and newsworthy," Holcomb wrote. "I spent much time during the Exxon Valdez oil spill, 21 years ago, and in every other oil spill since then addressing them, and I now just consider this a part of the politics of an oil spill."

Holcomb criticized Sharp's guillemot paper, saying it relied on the return of banded birds and lacked daily tracking for individual birds released and observations of control groups.

Ken Rosenberg, director of conservation science for Cornell University's ornithology lab, said the limited scientific evidence available suggests that survival rates vary widely from one species to the next. Brown pelicans -- the poster child of oiled Gulf of Mexico birds -- seem to mind the cleansing and human contact that comes with it less than other species, he said.

"I think it's important, though, for people to understand that cleaning individual birds is just the beginning of the conservation story because the end goal is to restore the populations of affected species and to make sure their habitat and the entire ecosystem is restored in the long term," Rosenberg said in an interview. "This is much more difficult and expensive but needs to be part of the cost dedicated to the cleanup."

Research proposal

Researchers at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., are seeking funding to track released birds with technology that was unavailable during previous major oil spills -- devices powerful enough to communicate birds' locations to satellites but small enough to allow pelican-sized species to fly unencumbered.

Dan Boritt, the zoo's acting curator of birds, said the cleaning effort should be judged by what percentage of birds survive long enough to reproduce. To measure that, he said in an interview, scientists need specific, long-term information on the released birds.

It costs about \$5,000 per bird to buy the device and use it for a year of tracking, he said. That cost is reasonable, he argued, given cleaning operations are estimated to cost between \$4,000 to \$18,000 per bird.

"I don't think any of these studies have proven definitively one way or another that [cleanings] are really biologically successful ways to save wildlife," Boritt said. The satellite tracking study "will answer going forward whether or not this is a conservation method."

But in the absence of definitive answers, Boritt said the response should err on the side of action.

"Once these birds get oiled, typically, without human help, it's end of story," he said.

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Oil firms vow safety in wells far deeper than BP's

03:40 PM CDT on Sunday, June 27, 2010

By RANDY LEE LOFTIS / The Dallas Morning News

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The 5,000 feet of water between the Gulf of Mexico's surface and the Deepwater Horizon blowout has kept the oil and natural gas flowing.

Each time [BP](#) has tried to cap its runaway well, the company has warned that no one has ever tried it at such a depth.

But off the coast of Texas, companies have been drilling in far deeper water, sometimes twice as deep – and making the same environmental and safety promises that BP made for its Deepwater Horizon operation.

The BP blowout is calling attention to unique engineering challenges and environmental risks associated with seeking oil and gas at unprecedented depths in the gulf.

Equipment designed to withstand harsh conditions at extreme depth failed, perhaps because of those conditions, making some engineers discount assurances that unexpected problems could be stopped at far greater depths.

At the same time, the depth at which the blowout occurred has triggered much more harm to the gulf ecosystem than a shallower leak would have caused, leading to concerns about even worse effects from a possible deeper spill.

The companies operating in extremely deep water off the Texas coast make their safety and environmental assurances in documents they filed with federal regulators in support of their drilling plans.

Many of the deepest wells are near the continent's northernmost coral reefs, treasuries of marine life.

As BP's plan vowed, other exploration and production plans say a sub-sea blowout is so unlikely as to merit little or no discussion and no special review. If a blowout occurred even at 10,000 feet, company plans assert, readily available technology would stop the flow of oil and gas quickly, with minor environmental damage.

Operating at an extreme depth is an engineering challenge, largely because of high water pressure. Recent research shows that depth is also a major ecological factor, fundamentally changing how the gulf's biological systems respond to an uncontrolled rush of oil and gas.

Federally funded research – aimed almost exclusively at boosting deep-water drilling and often done in

close partnership with the oil and gas industry – has all but ignored the potential ecological damage from a deep blowout, despite pleas from marine biologists.

An examination of companies' drilling plans by *The Dallas Morning News* shows that the [Minerals Management Service](#), the agency that governs drilling in federal waters, has not increased its scrutiny when companies sought to drill at extreme depths.

Walruses in gulf?

The agency even failed to correct oil companies' regional spill response plans that listed arctic mammals such as walruses as local gulf species. The nearest walrus range to the gulf is in northeastern Canada.

[President Barack Obama](#) declared a six-month moratorium on new deep-water drilling to allow time to consider such concerns, but on Tuesday, a federal judge in [New Orleans](#) blocked the moratorium.

Obama's study commission on offshore drilling, chaired by former [Environmental Protection Agency](#) Administrator [William K. Reilly](#) and former Sen. Bob Graham of Florida, is supposed to examine deep-water issues.

Some experts say worries over depth are misplaced.

Dr. Robert Randall, a professor of ocean and civil engineering at [Texas A&M University](#) who works with the industry and federal regulators, said stopping an extremely deep blowout would not be any harder than halting a shallower operation because both require the same techniques.

"To me, yes, those capabilities are at hand," Randall said. Offshore drilling industry executives agree.

But to Dr. Bob Bea, a former Shell executive who is now an engineering professor at the [University of California](#), Berkeley, stopping a blowout at 10,000 feet is just a fantasy because of the brutal conditions imposed by pressure, temperature and inaccessibility.

It would be "much more difficult," Bea wrote in an e-mail. "The difficulty is an exponential function of the depth of the water.

"Same as the difference between going to the Moon and going to Mars."

When Kerr-McGee drilled the first well from a fixed platform in federal waters off the coast of Louisiana in 1947, a worker with a snorkel probably could have handled most repairs. It was just 16 feet to the bottom.

Since then, diminishing returns from shallow drilling, plus the development of new technology, have pushed the search for oil into previously unimaginable depths.

In 2004, [Transocean's](#) Discover Deep Seas rig drilled a well at 10,011 feet about 200 miles south of New Orleans. Other gulf wells have come in at similar depths.

Just one section of the gulf, about 160 miles east of Corpus Christi, illustrates how drilling at extreme depths has become almost routine.

Alaminos Canyon is a sharp gouge in the gulf floor and one of the hottest locations for ultra-deep

drilling. Since 1996, federal regulators have approved 83 plans for the area that authorized wells as deep as or deeper than BP's blowout, according to Minerals Management Service records.

The service approved scores of wells at 7,000 feet or deeper. Nearly two dozen plans cleared the way for drilling between 9,000 and 10,000 feet. Two operations were approved for deeper than 10,000 feet. Not all of the approved wells have been drilled.

Alaminos Canyon is the site of the Perdido complex. In 8,000 feet of water, it is the world's deepest direct vertical access spar project, an arrangement of seafloor wells attached to a central hub, something like a maypole. Shell runs the operation, with other companies participating.

Near freezing point

Most oil companies operating in ultra-deep water in the gulf did not respond to requests for comment. In an e-mail, [Exxon Mobil](#) spokeswoman Cynthia Bergman said the Irving-based company is "evaluating response capabilities in light of the spill in the Gulf."

Temperature is one factor that depends on depth. Water at BP's blowout site is near freezing. Methane hydrates, a mixture of frozen water and methane, or natural gas, scuttled an early attempt to put a containment dome over the well.

Pressure is another factor. Since 5,000 feet is far deeper than divers can go, work is done only by remote-operated vehicles designed to withstand nearly 2,237 pounds of pressure per square inch

That's about 152 times greater than at the surface. At 10,000 feet, the numbers all double.

When things have gone correctly, such depths have been no impediment to drilling. Deep water, defined as 1,000 feet or deeper, yielded 70 percent of the Gulf of Mexico's oil and 36 percent of its natural gas in 2007, said the [American Petroleum Institute](#), the industry's main U.S. trade group.

The industry has done the research to drill safely at extreme depths, said Brad Beitler, vice president for technology of [FMC Technologies](#), a Houston-based oil and gas equipment and services firm.

"It's a very structured process, as you design equipment, to look at what possibly could happen," he said. "You basically get a bunch of experts around a table and you pick out the worst case. ... We go through quite a sophisticated analysis of these systems."

Handling a blowout at such depths, however, has proved to be different.

BP memos released by Congress show that the well's blowout preventer, a massive piece of machinery meant as the last-ditch safeguard against a spill, had a leaking hydraulic system before the blowout. It isn't known yet if the pressure and temperature of extreme depth caused the leak, or if fail-safe equipment meant for even greater depths might have similar problems.

Whether the BP blowout happened because of human error, cutting corners, faulty equipment or a combination, it has defeated all assaults for more than two months.

Randall Luthi, who ran the Minerals Management Service under President [George W. Bush](#), said in a statement released by the National Ocean Industries Association, a trade group he now leads: "The technology to respond to the release of oil in these environments appears not to have kept pace."

Deep ecology

Just as depth may have contributed to the blowout and has confounded efforts to stop it, depth also has worsened the environmental damage from the leaking oil and gas.

Until now, however, the gulf ecosystem has received little attention in the push to drill in deeper waters, marine biologists say.

"No one thought about what that means ecologically," said Dr. Larry [McKinney](#), director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

The discovery of huge, submerged masses of oil, gas, water and chemical dispersant from the BP blowout is raising troubling new questions.

"What do you do when you have a cloud of this stuff that's the area of the city of [San Francisco](#) and 600 feet thick?" McKinney asked. "And that's just one of the smaller clouds, perhaps, that's out there."

McKinney served on a federal advisory committee on ultra-deep-water oil and gas development in 2007-08. He said he felt pretty lonely on a panel dominated by the petroleum industry. When he submitted a memo on the need to incorporate deep-water ecology into federally funded research, it went nowhere.

"They had this huge pressure on them to develop domestic oil and gas resources to get away from the foreign [sources], and of course the Gulf of Mexico was where it was," McKinney said. "I gave my little report, and it didn't go in."

McKinney is worried that "floating dead zones" with drastically low oxygen levels will wash over coral reefs in the northern gulf. Some research now suggests that those corals are the originals, the sources of the world's corals in shallower water – the tropical rain forests of the sea.

"Those things are like forests of corals," McKinney said. "It's just an incredibly diverse community.

"If you kill all those, what's the recovery time? Hundreds of years."

Researchers are finding that the floating dead zones formed precisely because of the depth of the blowout.

When methane escapes from the sea floor at shallow depths, it's under little water pressure. Storms mix the water, shoving the bottom layers to the surface, where the methane releases into the atmosphere.

Those factors limit the ecological harm from methane leaks in shallow water. A leak at greater depth can have a profoundly different effect, as the Deepwater Horizon is now showing.

"It complicates things a lot for it to be deep in the water column," said Dr. Samantha Joye, a marine scientist at the [University of Georgia](#) who has been on the gulf documenting the spill's subsurface effects. "The biggest problem by far is oxygen."

Joye said the high water pressure is making methane escaping with the oil dissolve into the water, keeping much of it from reaching the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, nutrient-rich deep water is supplying clouds of microbes, which are eating as much methane

as they can; microbe populations are growing fast to take advantage of the newfound bounty.

That might sound like a good thing, but the feeding process also uses up massive amounts of oxygen – twice as much oxygen as methane, Joye said.

It's as if everyone had to eat a half-pound of onions for every quarter-pound of hamburger. Pretty soon, there's an onion shortage.

Microbes are going to strip oxygen from more and more water to consume the methane from the BP leak, Joye said. That means the areas with little oxygen – vast areas that are now no good to marine life – will just keep growing.

"Do the math," she said. "It quickly becomes a precarious situation"

Recovery, Joye said, could take years to decades. A blowout at 10,000 feet, she said, would be far worse.

"I've never been that comfortable with deep-water drilling just because [what] if something like this happens," Joye said. "It was one of those things nobody wanted to think about because they were pretending it was never going to happen.

"Well, it's happened. We were woefully unprepared for this."

Engineering ethics

The seeming inevitability of failure may be raising basic questions about the quest for deeper and deeper oil.

"As engineers, our code of ethics, our No. 1 canon, is to put public health and safety first," said Dr. Robert B. Gilbert, a University of Texas engineering professor. "It's really, really hard to do that in the real world."

Gilbert studied the New Orleans levee failures after [Hurricane Katrina](#). "One of the lessons we keep seeing is that it's hard to stop failures from happening," he said. "We're not that good, and we don't understand nature that well.

"But the thing we can do is be prepared for them when they do happen. And that's where I think we keep falling short."

Randall, the Texas A&M professor, said he is optimistic about the offshore oil and gas industry's ability to find new ways to drill safely. It will do so as it seeks petroleum in ever deeper water, he said.

But there's always the human factor, he noted.

"You can always doubt the quarterback," Randall said. "This drilling's been going on for 40-something years and more – probably at least 20 years in this depth of water. There's never been a problem.

"We get complacent – 'Well, nothing's ever happened for 40 years' – so you make a mistake.

"It's a disastrous mistake."

The logo for shreveporttimes.com, featuring the website name in a bold, white, sans-serif font against a dark blue rectangular background.

June 27, 2010

Shale production unaffected by Gulf oil leak

By Vickie Welborn
vwelborn@gannett.com

The oil that's been gushing into the Gulf of Mexico for more than 60 days will leave a lasting impact upon everyday lives, livelihoods, the environment and wildlife for years to come, experts agree.

The state's southern region will feel the brunt of the devastation, but ripples are reaching to this corner of the state in the form of lost jobs — and some cases, heartache. Four Sabine Parish men who worked on the Deepwater Horizon rig are survivors of the explosion that took 11 lives and sent millions of gallons of oil rushing into the waters, onto shores and into lives.

Surprisingly, the disaster has not been felt in a related industry that has become an essential part of northwest Louisiana. Drilling for natural gas in the Haynesville Shale so far is untouched by what's happening hundreds of miles to the south.

If there's an upside, the oil leak has elevated the nationwide energy discussion, "and we should expect more," said Joan Dunlap, Petrohawk Energy's vice president of investor relations.

On other levels, none of the area oil and gas companies report an increase in job inquiries from displaced offshore rig workers. And natural gas prices are remaining steady.

Other than additional dollars potentially being shifted onshore, activity in the Haynesville Shale should remain unaffected, according to Don Briggs, Louisiana Oil and Gas Association president.

"If anything, we may see some of the investment of capital that would be extended on deep water operations and see some of that move onshore and it could possibly move to the Haynesville Shale. That would be a positive impact," Briggs said. "Some of the companies have said if they can't be offshore they would have to come onshore with their investment capital."

An example of that is Devon Energy, which announced in November it was divesting itself of its Gulf assets and focusing on onshore plays in the U.S. and Canada. The company has 570,000 acres under lease in the Haynesville Shale.

Of the major players in the shale region, only Shell Oil Company has offshore wells. Chesapeake Energy and EnCana Oil & Gas USA do not have any Gulf interests. Petrohawk Energy transitioned out of the Gulf in 2007, selling onshore and offshore assets for \$825 million to focus on exploration and production from shales.

Shell has not made any decisions to move its offshore wells, even though it has "safely suspended current activity on two of our offshore wells, in accordance with the Department of Interior's six-month deep water moratorium. This suspension impacts a sidetrack well operation to our recent Vito deep water discovery and impacts planned drilling at our Tobago field, which is part of our recently announced Perdido Development. Another planned well for our recent Appomattox discovery, previously scheduled to be drilled this summer, will now be postponed. Some non-exploratory offshore well operations, such as well completions and abandonment work that meet stated criteria

and technical reviews, are not impacted by the six-month moratorium," said Julie A. Sacco, Shell communications representative.

"We are currently evaluating our offshore business plan for the months ahead. Shell has four semi-submersible drilling rigs under contract in the Gulf of Mexico. We also operate four additional drilling rigs on our production platforms — Auger, Ursa, Mars, and Perdido."

The Louisiana Office of Conservation, one of the regulatory agencies for shale activity, has issued new emergency rules for offshore drilling, but there have been no changes suggested for onshore drilling for natural gas "where operational and emergency issues are much less complex," said Kevin McCotter, Chesapeake's senior director of corporate development. Chesapeake is operating 34 rigs in the shale.

Learning experience

If there is a teachable moment from the deepwater rig explosion, it's being more cognizant of the importance of well safety, said Doug Houk, EnCana's director of community and public relations.

EnCana employees are trained to know how to prevent a loss of a well control. But if it occurs, they also are trained to respond, he said.

A variety of problems, including a malfunctioning blowout preventer, were reported with the Deepwater Horizon prior to its explosion in April.

All of EnCana's drilling rig supervisors, superintendents, drilling engineers and coordinators have well control training that includes training specific to situations normally seen drilling wells in the Haynesville, Houk said. For example, at EnCana's rig sites, the blowout preventer is checked twice daily during drilling and is pressure tested every 14 days.

All drilling rig crews are trained on early gas kick detection and detailed well shut-in procedures. They continually manage well pressure during the drilling process to ensure that control is maintained. And well control equipment on the drilling rigs is being standardized for Encana's operations, Houk said.

Gas prices

Global factors typically weigh into the nation's fuel prices but not so with natural gas prices in response to the massive underwater oil leak.

Natural gas pricing has not changed materially since the spill. Prices have been weak for some time based on a supply and the demand picture that has been driven by the global recession, and to a lesser extent, seasonality, Dunlap said.

McCotter agreed: "There are a myriad of factors that impact natural gas prices and speculating on prices as a result of the Gulf tragedy would be simply inappropriate. There continues to be a strong case made in our country, however, that American-produced natural gas is the fuel of choice for reducing harmful air emissions and building our nation's energy security.

Shale commitment

Oil and gas operators that have sunk millions — and in some cases billions — of dollars into the local and state economy to grab their piece of the Haynesville Shale are committed to its development.

Petrohawk maintains its plan to spend close to \$1 billion this year, translating into almost 3,000 jobs

just associated with the company's drilling and pipeline budgets, Dunlap said.

Likewise, the shale is a critical part of Shell's ongoing "natural gas strategy to grow the North America's tight gas portfolio," said Sacco. "Specifically, and with our latest acquisitions, Eagle Ford shale, in South Texas and Marcellus Shale, in the northeastern U.S., Shell has invested substantially ranging in the billions in North American natural gas exploration and development."

Shell's production, as planned, is ramping up, in particular as a result of high activity in the Haynesville, and production in unconventional gas plays in North America increased 62 percent over 2008.

"Within two years, it is expected that more than half of our global production will come from natural gas," Sacco said.



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Deeper wells in Gulf of Mexico pose heightened risks

12:00 AM CDT on Sunday, June 27, 2010

By RANDY LEE LOFTIS / The Dallas Morning News
rloftis@dallasnews.com

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Walruses in gulf?

The agency even failed to correct oil companies' regional spill response plans that listed arctic mammals such as walruses as local gulf species. The nearest walrus range to the gulf is in northeastern Canada.

[President Barack Obama](#) declared a six-month moratorium on new deep-water drilling to allow time to consider such concerns, but on Tuesday, a federal judge in [New Orleans](#) blocked the moratorium.

Obama's study commission on offshore drilling, chaired by former [Environmental Protection Agency](#) Administrator [William K. Reilly](#) and former Sen. Bob Graham of Florida, is supposed to examine deep-water issues.

Some experts say worries over depth are misplaced.

Dr. Robert Randall, a professor of ocean and civil engineering at [Texas A&M University](#) who works with the industry and federal regulators, said stopping an extremely deep blowout would not be any harder than halting a shallower operation because both require the same techniques.

"To me, yes, those capabilities are at hand," Randall said. Offshore drilling industry executives agree.

But to Dr. Bob Bea, a former Shell executive who is now an engineering professor at the [University of California](#), Berkeley, stopping a blowout at 10,000 feet is just a fantasy because of the brutal conditions imposed by pressure, temperature and inaccessibility.

It would be "much more difficult," Bea wrote in an e-mail. "The difficulty is an exponential function of the depth of the water.

"Same as the difference between going to the Moon and going to Mars."

When Kerr-McGee drilled the first well from a fixed platform in federal waters off the coast of Louisiana in 1947, a worker with a snorkel probably could have handled most repairs. It was just 16 feet to the bottom.

Since then, diminishing returns from shallow drilling, plus the development of new technology, have pushed the search for oil into previously unimaginable depths.

In 2004, [Transocean's](#) Discover Deep Seas rig drilled a well at 10,011 feet about 200 miles south of New Orleans. Other gulf wells have come in at similar depths.

Just one section of the gulf, about 160 miles east of Corpus Christi, illustrates how drilling at extreme depths has become almost routine.

Alaminos Canyon is a sharp gouge in the gulf floor and one of the hottest locations for ultra-deep

drilling. Since 1996, federal regulators have approved 83 plans for the area that authorized wells as deep as or deeper than BP's blowout, according to Minerals Management Service records.

The service approved scores of wells at 7,000 feet or deeper. Nearly two dozen plans cleared the way for drilling between 9,000 and 10,000 feet. Two operations were approved for deeper than 10,000 feet. Not all of the approved wells have been drilled.

Alaminos Canyon is the site of the Perdido complex. In 8,000 feet of water, it is the world's deepest direct vertical access spar project, an arrangement of seafloor wells attached to a central hub, something like a maypole. Shell runs the operation, with other companies participating.

Near freezing point

Most oil companies operating in ultra-deep water in the gulf did not respond to requests for comment. In an e-mail, [Exxon Mobil](#) spokeswoman Cynthia Bergman said the Irving-based company is "evaluating response capabilities in light of the spill in the Gulf."

Temperature is one factor that depends on depth. Water at BP's blowout site is near freezing. Methane hydrates, a mixture of frozen water and methane, or natural gas, scuttled an early attempt to put a containment dome over the well.

Pressure is another factor. Since 5,000 feet is far deeper than divers can go, work is done only by remote-operated vehicles designed to withstand nearly 2,237 pounds of pressure per square inch

That's about 152 times greater than at the surface. At 10,000 feet, the numbers all double.

When things have gone correctly, such depths have been no impediment to drilling. Deep water, defined as 1,000 feet or deeper, yielded 70 percent of the Gulf of Mexico's oil and 36 percent of its natural gas in 2007, said the [American Petroleum Institute](#), the industry's main U.S. trade group.

The industry has done the research to drill safely at extreme depths, said Brad Beitler, vice president for technology of [FMC Technologies](#), a Houston-based oil and gas equipment and services firm.

"It's a very structured process, as you design equipment, to look at what possibly could happen," he said. "You basically get a bunch of experts around a table and you pick out the worst case. ... We go through quite a sophisticated analysis of these systems."

Handling a blowout at such depths, however, has proved to be different.

BP memos released by Congress show that the well's blowout preventer, a massive piece of machinery meant as the last-ditch safeguard against a spill, had a leaking hydraulic system before the blowout. It isn't known yet if the pressure and temperature of extreme depth caused the leak, or if fail-safe equipment meant for even greater depths might have similar problems.

Whether the BP blowout happened because of human error, cutting corners, faulty equipment or a combination, it has defeated all assaults for more than two months.

Randall Luthi, who ran the Minerals Management Service under President [George W. Bush](#), said in a statement released by the National Ocean Industries Association, a trade group he now leads: "The technology to respond to the release of oil in these environments appears not to have kept pace."

Deep ecology

Just as depth may have contributed to the blowout and has confounded efforts to stop it, depth also has worsened the environmental damage from the leaking oil and gas.

Until now, however, the gulf ecosystem has received little attention in the push to drill in deeper waters, marine biologists say.

"No one thought about what that means ecologically," said Dr. Larry [McKinney](#), director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

The discovery of huge, submerged masses of oil, gas, water and chemical dispersant from the BP blowout is raising troubling new questions.

"What do you do when you have a cloud of this stuff that's the area of the city of [San Francisco](#) and 600 feet thick?" McKinney asked. "And that's just one of the smaller clouds, perhaps, that's out there."

McKinney served on a federal advisory committee on ultra-deep-water oil and gas development in 2007-08. He said he felt pretty lonely on a panel dominated by the petroleum industry. When he submitted a memo on the need to incorporate deep-water ecology into federally funded research, it went nowhere.

"They had this huge pressure on them to develop domestic oil and gas resources to get away from the foreign [sources], and of course the Gulf of Mexico was where it was," McKinney said. "I gave my little report, and it didn't go in."

McKinney is worried that "floating dead zones" with drastically low oxygen levels will wash over coral reefs in the northern gulf. Some research now suggests that those corals are the originals, the sources of the world's corals in shallower water – the tropical rain forests of the sea.

"Those things are like forests of corals," McKinney said. "It's just an incredibly diverse community.

"If you kill all those, what's the recovery time? Hundreds of years."

Researchers are finding that the floating dead zones formed precisely because of the depth of the blowout.

When methane escapes from the sea floor at shallow depths, it's under little water pressure. Storms mix the water, shoving the bottom layers to the surface, where the methane releases into the atmosphere.

Those factors limit the ecological harm from methane leaks in shallow water. A leak at greater depth can have a profoundly different effect, as the Deepwater Horizon is now showing.

"It complicates things a lot for it to be deep in the water column," said Dr. Samantha Joye, a marine scientist at the [University of Georgia](#) who has been on the gulf documenting the spill's subsurface effects. "The biggest problem by far is oxygen."

Joye said the high water pressure is making methane escaping with the oil dissolve into the water, keeping much of it from reaching the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, nutrient-rich deep water is supplying clouds of microbes, which are eating as much methane

as they can; microbe populations are growing fast to take advantage of the newfound bounty.

That might sound like a good thing, but the feeding process also uses up massive amounts of oxygen – twice as much oxygen as methane, Joye said.

It's as if everyone had to eat a half-pound of onions for every quarter-pound of hamburger. Pretty soon, there's an onion shortage.

Microbes are going to strip oxygen from more and more water to consume the methane from the BP leak, Joye said. That means the areas with little oxygen – vast areas that are now no good to marine life – will just keep growing.

"Do the math," she said. "It quickly becomes a precarious situation."

Recovery, Joye said, could take years to decades. A blowout at 10,000 feet, she said, would be far worse.

"I've never been that comfortable with deep-water drilling just because [what] if something like this happens," Joye said. "It was one of those things nobody wanted to think about because they were pretending it was never going to happen."

"Well, it's happened. We were woefully unprepared for this."

Engineering ethics

The seeming inevitability of failure may be raising basic questions about the quest for deeper and deeper oil.

"As engineers, our code of ethics, our No. 1 canon, is to put public health and safety first," said Dr. Robert B. Gilbert, a University of Texas engineering professor. "It's really, really hard to do that in the real world."

Gilbert studied the New Orleans levee failures after [Hurricane Katrina](#). "One of the lessons we keep seeing is that it's hard to stop failures from happening," he said. "We're not that good, and we don't understand nature that well."

"But the thing we can do is be prepared for them when they do happen. And that's where I think we keep falling short."

Randall, the Texas A&M professor, said he is optimistic about the offshore oil and gas industry's ability to find new ways to drill safely. It will do so as it seeks petroleum in ever deeper water, he said.

But there's always the human factor, he noted.

"You can always doubt the quarterback," Randall said. "This drilling's been going on for 40-something years and more – probably at least 20 years in this depth of water. There's never been a problem."

"We get complacent – 'Well, nothing's ever happened for 40 years' – so you make a mistake."

"It's a disastrous mistake."



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Costs, questions for Gulf promise

Catherine Cheney
Sun, 27 Jun 2010 22:46:05 EST

In his Oval Office speech on the BP oil disaster, President Barack Obama declared he would reverse the devastation caused by crude oil on the area's shoreline, but pledged his administration would also address "decades of environmental degradation" and "multiple economic disasters" that have ruined the fragile Gulf Coast.

"Beyond compensating the people of the Gulf in the short term, it's also clear we need a long-term plan to restore the unique beauty and bounty of this region," said the president, in a speech that initially inspired hope among viewers and listeners throughout Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida.

With those words, however, Obama also promised to rejuvenate the Gulf Coast ecosystem — a Herculean task that experts say could take decades, cost tens of billions of dollars and ultimately fail to satisfy conflicting demands in the region.

On Monday, Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy and former Governor of Mississippi, begins a visit to the Gulf Coast, 13 days after he was announced as the head of the Gulf Coast Restoration Plan. According to his office, Mabus will travel throughout the Gulf Coast through Friday to begin his assessment of the area and meet with state and local officials.

He will also face the challenge of applying the President's hopeful rhetoric to a complex reality. While the commitment from Obama seems evident, the funding, strategy, and plan itself seem unclear.

BP will pay for efforts to undo the oil spill damage but the company is one of many actors—including the federal government, according to some environmentalists—responsible for the decades of Gulf Coast deterioration that Obama promised to reverse. Each of the Gulf Coast states have different ideas on how to restore the coastal ecosystem. And they must balance environmental interests against a wide variety of economic ones, including the seafood, commercial shipping, tourism and oil and gas industries.

According to Gulf Coast environmental experts, any effective recovery plan would become the largest environmental restoration project in the nation's history, far surpassing the \$12 billion cost to repair Florida's Everglades. Mabus still has to address the big, multi-billion-dollar question: who will pay?

"The administration is trying to extract money from BP," explained Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian from Rice University. "BP is saying, 'Nuh-uh — time out. Your wetlands were damaged prior to the oil spill.'"

Another complication Mabus will face is where to draw the line: Who wins, and who loses? What portion of the 1,680 miles of American coastline in the Gulf of Mexico will the government define as eligible for restoration?

Certainly, Louisiana qualifies, as a state that lost 217 square miles of land on the two days of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina combined, with another football field of marshland lost every 38 minutes. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) has indicated that help cannot come fast enough. She has proposed a new governing authority for the Mississippi River Delta and Louisiana coast, hoping to overhaul existing federal agencies and bypass many of the bureaucratic hurdles to restoration.

The coastal region of the Gulf of Mexico is home to half of the United States' coastal wetlands, and to a wealth of resources, wildlife, and natural habitats. But its coastline is carved with pipelines, and the Mississippi River, which empties into the Gulf, is "over-channelled": altered from its natural course to facilitate shipping.

At the same time, the Gulf provides 1.2 billion pounds of fresh seafood and produces 30 percent of the nation's domestic crude oil production. Any efforts to reverse the complex, long-term ecological problems along the coastline -- including vanishing wetlands and habitats -- must balance nature against jobs and billions of dollars in annual revenue.

Given that challenge, experts like Stan Senner, Director of Conservation Science at the Ocean Conservancy, said Obama might not realize the scope of the commitment he made.

Senner, who was Alaska's top environmental restoration and cleanup officer after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, said that fixing the oil-damaged ecology around Prince William Sound was incredibly difficult, even with a much smaller, limited oil spill and only one state involved in the cleanup. Although the President vowed to create a cleanup plan "designed by states, local communities, tribes, fishermen, businesses, conservationists, and other Gulf residents," Senner said he feels left in the dark.

"I think the initial concern is simply a lack of information about what the government really is intending to do. What does this look like?" asked Senner. "Mr. Mabus has been named somehow in charge of this Gulf Coast Restoration Plan. I really don't know what that means and how organizations like mine, much less the public, are supposed to be

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For an effective cleanup, Senner said, the government must create an integrated, effective, efficient and well-funded plan, one that would address the complexities of both ecology and industry in the Gulf Coast, without "just divvying up the pot and saying, 'Okay Alabama, you get this, Louisiana, you get this, Mississippi, you get this.' "

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, however, was concerned from the minute he heard "plan" in the President's Oval Office address. Citing the 2004 creation of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, a partnership between the Gulf Coast states meant to "enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico," Barbour said he and other local leaders already have a blueprint for restoring the ecosystem.

"We don't need Washington to tell us what our recovery plan ought to be. I thank Secretary Mabus and I hope he will be an advocate for what the Gulf States decide," Barbour told POLITICO in an interview. "But the most important thing is that the plan be developed by the people in the Gulf States, not dictated down by Washington... and when I say the states ought to direct this, I say it literally."

While Barbour wants to restore the ecological health of the area, he said he is skeptical of any projects that involve rerouting the Mississippi. While many experts say rerouting the river is the key to undoing decades of damage and wetlands erosion, Barbour said that it would strain commercial shipping industry. In the meantime, the U.S. must continue to protect, and maximize, the interests of the oil and gas industries, he said, calling Obama's deepwater drilling moratorium a "horrible policy."

In Florida, meanwhile, many feel that they are the most victimized by the BP oil spill.

"A lot of folks talk about how Louisiana and Mississippi are innocent victims," said Jim Beever, Principal Planner at the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council. "But remember, those areas have made partnerships with oil drilling. Florida has not. Florida is against offshore oil drilling."

Beever and his team have worked for years to identify the dollar amount needed to restore the Southwest coast of Florida—mangroves, marshes, habitats, and estuaries—and determined the final figure of \$15.4 billion. He said he expects the administration to address Southwest Florida as part of the Gulf Coast Recovery Plan, even though oil from the Deepwater Horizon disaster has not yet reached its shores.

In Louisiana, meanwhile, an aide to Landrieu, who specializes in coastal wetlands restoration, said that a proper plan for the state would cost \$50 billion spread out over thirty years. He added that the government should begin the recovery immediately, emphasizing that while the National Resource Damage Assessment—a Department of the Interior program that evaluates impact after oil spills—may take months to determine the effect of the BP disaster, long-term coastal restoration is a separate issue.

"When you have starts and stops and unreliable funding, the very thing you're trying to preserve is washing away," said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity, who added that Louisiana has already received approval for several environmental projects that still await funding. "That process of authorizing projects and waiting for the government to appropriate money is not going to work, and when you combine that with the competing interests of multiple agencies it grinds it to a halt."

Keith Ouchley, Louisiana State Director of the Nature Conservancy, has also drafted recommendations, which he hopes will be incorporated into the federal plan, since Mabus's ground assessment is late in coming.

"We're being proactive in this and we are going to reach out ourselves and see if we can't provide some feedback," he said. The recommendations include creation of a Gulf of Mexico Restoration Trust Fund, built from a per-barrel tax on oil.

Brinkley said Obama needs to be more clear about all that this recovery will entail, explaining that there cannot be a middle ground to restoration, as in past years.

"We as a country have only two options," he said. "We can either say, 'It's a wasteland down there. Forget this way of life. It's an oil and gas field and let's use it as an industrial zone.' " Brinkley said. "Or, we can say, 'Save the wetlands.' "

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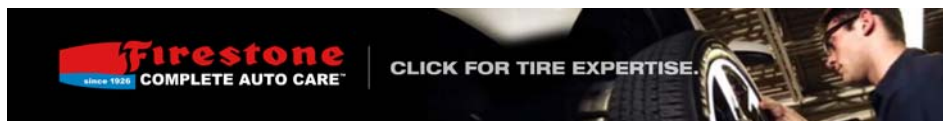
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Two men involved in private contract efforts to clean the recent gulf oil spill remained hospitalized Thursday evening after reportedly becoming sick while working in the waters of Breton Sound, according to local hospital officials.

The U.S. Coast Guard called a total of 125 boats involved in oil cleanup operations back to port after seven crew members on four different boats became ill Wednesday night. After being hospitalized overnight, five victims were later released.

Coast Guard Capt. Meredith Austin said Thursday that the workers had been issued protective clothing including gloves and boot coverings but none of the workers received respirators because air monitoring showed safe levels of airborne pollutants.

The cleanup fleet will remain in port pending an investigation, Austin said. In addition to the Coast Guard, the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and safety officers from BP are currently investigating the illnesses.

The men, ranging in age from 19 to 50, were taken to West Jefferson Medical Center near New Orleans. The men were treated for severe headaches, dizziness, nausea and skin irritation, said hospital spokeswoman Taslin Alfonzo.

Alfonzo said the emergency room physician could not determine what caused the men to become sick, but said they were exposed to a chemical-based irritant and treated with intravenous fluids to dilute any possible toxins.

A growing number of out-of-work fishermen who are taking jobs with BP laying booms or operating skimming boats are reportedly becoming ill after being near the oil slick or related dispersants. However, a BP spokesman on Wednesday said the company was unaware of any health issues associated with the cleanup.


State officials are requesting the federal government to place mobile health clinics in the rural southern part of the state where fishermen live in an effort to better deal with any potential environmental health threats.

Short URL: <http://stopthehype.com/?p=1279>



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Monday, Jun 28, 2010

Posted on Sat, Jun. 26, 2010

Taylor takes action after frustrating flight

By KAREN NELSON

BILOXI — U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor has already begun to swing into action to resolve confusion with the oil-spill response in Mississippi waters.

After a morning flight, he expressed what so many have feared — that the effort was scattered and lacked leadership or focus, while oil marched into the Mississippi Sound between the barrier islands.

Taylor said the Environmental Protection Agency was using military infrared technology from aircraft in Louisiana waters and was able to distinguish heavy crude from diesel-like sheen. Such technology can also sort algae blooms from oil, he said, and can be vital to the response.

But as often happens, the EPA was working separately from the Coast Guard. Taylor got them together.

“I got the message to the commander, he turned around and got it to the EPA, and it’s going to happen,” Taylor said.

EPA scientist Mark Thomas confirmed that by today, the twin-engine plane will begin looking at the barrier islands along Mississippi’s coastline with the infrared technology, flying out of Gulfport.

It will locate oil and upload the data to give skimmers a heads up on where the heaviest concentrations of oil lie.

This could make a big difference in the overall strategy, and help the workers contain oil better, Taylor said.

“We don’t want our limited resources going to the wrong place. And if you can catch the heavy crude, it won’t turn into sheen,” he said.

Taylor also scheduled a trip on a shrimp boat in the Sound this weekend so he could see for himself, and hopefully correct, problems with skimming and rounding up oil.

He told Coast Guard officials Saturday he would take his Boston Whaler out to the boat if he couldn’t get a ride with them.

“I gave them a detailed plan, what I thought they ought to be doing,” Taylor said. “I don’t know if any of it’s being done.”

Raining oil in Louisiana? Video suggests Gulf oil spill causing crude rain

Raining oil? A video purports to show the aftermath of an oily rain that has left a rainbow sheen on the streets of River Ridge, Louisiana. The EPA says that an oily rain is highly unlikely.



Raining oil in Louisiana? A YouTube video purports to show the aftermath of an oily rain in River Ridge, Louisiana, some 45 miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

(YouTube screenshot)

By Eoin O'Carroll, CSMonitor.com

posted June 24, 2010 at 6:07 pm EDT

Raining oil in Louisiana? An unsettling – and unverified – amateur video shows what appears to be the aftermath of an oily rain in Louisiana, some 45 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico.

It's unclear from the video whether the oily sheen seen on the ground really fell from the sky. Crude oil normally doesn't evaporate, but some are speculating that oil mixed with Corexit 9500, the dispersant that BP is using on the ever-growing slick, could take to the air.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has issued statements saying that the agency "has no data, information or scientific basis that suggests that oil mixed with dispersant could possibly evaporate from the Gulf into the water cycle."

IN PICTURES: Response to the oil spill on the Gulf Coast

The auto blog Jalopnik dug up a 2003 study that shows that oil on the open ocean could evaporate under the right conditions. And it's unclear how the Corexit 9500 dispersant affects evaporation.

If it were raining Corexit 9500 in River Ridge, that would be very bad news. Calling the dispersant unnecessarily toxic, the EPA has ordered BP to stop spraying it on the slick, an order that the oil company has so far ignored.

Is the video for real? For now, skepticism is warranted. Have a look for yourself:

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Tightened regulations on asbestos abatement planned in Arkansas

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Stephen Glauser

June 28th, 2010 - Environmental officials in Arkansas have proposed amending the state's asbestos abatement regulations to require more extensive air testing before, during and after asbestos projects are completed.

Previously, testing was only required when a project was completed.

Enviro.BLR.com reported that the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) will now require liability insurance and documentation of workers seeking asbestos certification. Asbestos removal requires specialized training because the mineral presents a health danger and has been linked to diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

The changes will affect demolition and construction firms, as well as those conducting inspections, air monitoring, project design, asbestos removal and anyone training workers in asbestos abatement, according to the business and legal issues website.

Individuals seeking asbestos training certification will need to be photographed and training providers will be required to notify ADEQ before and after training courses occur.

The planned changes are expected to decrease most asbestos-related fees by 25 percent, according to Enviro.BLR.com. In addition, license fees will be issued for a 12-month period, instead of expiring automatically on December 31 each year.

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posted 11:52 am Mon June 28, 2010 - Wichita Falls, TX

from NewsChannel 8 - <http://www.ktul.com/news/stories/0610/750179.html>

The Environmental Protection Agency says a Tulsa company has violated the federal Clean Water Act and has issued a cease and desist order to stop the company from discharging pollutants.

The EPA says an inspection of RAM Energy Resources, Inc.'s oil field production facility in Wichita County, Texas last month found unauthorized discharge of oil field brine and produced wastewater into Long Creek.

The EPA also says the inspection revealed water located at the discharge point of entry into Long Creek was contaminated with brine discharges and salts.

RAM Energy has been ordered to stop all discharges of pollutants from the facility, remove all brine from the flow path between the facility and the creek and provide written certification within 30 days that the activities have been completed.

RAM Energy is an independent oil and natural gas company that was founded in 1987.

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SOURCE: Industrial Info Resources



Jun 28, 2010 05:00 ET

EPA Again Delays Decision on Fuel-Ethanol Blend Rate Increase, an Industrial Info News Alert

SUGAR LAND, TX--(Marketwire - June 28, 2010) - Researched by Industrial Info Resources (Sugar Land, Texas) -- The United States Environmental Protection Agency has announced that it will delay a decision on increasing the fuel-ethanol blend rate until the fall of 2010. Currently, ethanol can be blended to a maximum of only 10% with petroleum gasoline for consumers. Producers would like to increase this rate to 15%, which would obviously increase the demand for the [renewable fuel](#).

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Greenwire

1. **SENATE:** Robert Byrd, longest-serving member of Congress in history, dies at 92

(06/28/2010)

Alex Kaplun and Robin Bravender, E&E reporter

Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the longest-serving member of Congress in U.S. history, died today, leaving behind a political legacy spanning generations and stirring up questions about the fate of the Senate's short-term agenda. He was 92.

"The family of U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., tearfully announces the passing of the longest serving member of Congress in U.S. history," Byrd's office said in a brief statement.

Byrd "died peacefully" at about 3 a.m. EDT at Inova Fairfax Hospital in Northern Virginia. Byrd was originally admitted to the hospital last week suffering from heat exhaustion and severe dehydration, but other conditions developed since, his office said.

Reaction across Capitol Hill and West Virginia began pouring in early this morning, with most political figures praising Byrd's staunch support for the Constitution and for his service to his home state.

"Robert Byrd's was one of the greatest minds the world has ever seen," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said in a statement. "He was the foremost guardian of the Senate's complex rules, procedures and customs, and as leader of both the majority and the minority caucuses in the Senate he knew better than most that legislation is the art of compromise."

House Natural Resources Chairman Nick Rahall, a Democrat who now becomes the senior member of the West Virginia delegation, described Byrd as, "West Virginia's greatest ally, her faithful son, a source of tremendous pride, and our Big Daddy."

Byrd grew up in southern West Virginia coal country and was the son of a coal miner. He worked a number of jobs after graduating high school, before winning a seat in the state Legislature in 1946.

Byrd was first elected to the U.S. House in 1952 and served three terms before launching what would become a historic Senate career in 1958. Byrd held his seat -- mostly unchallenged -- through 11 presidential administrations.

He holds a number of records -- longest tenure in Congress, longest tenure in the Senate, most Senate votes cast and most Senate leadership positions held. He leaves the Senate as its president pro tem -- a position that put him third in line for the presidency.

For the past two decades, Byrd was famous for steering billions of dollars to West Virginia from his post on the Senate Appropriations Committee. He became chairman of the panel in 1989, giving up the Senate Democratic leader post he had held for 12 years, and he served as the committee's top Democrat for nearly 20 years, including three separate stints as its chairman.

He was at times described as West Virginia's "one-man economic development program" in local media.

But Byrd's health had also started to fail in recent years. He was admitted to the hospital several times in early 2008 for various problems. He again spent about six weeks in the hospital in 2009 after suffering from several infections.

Democratic leaders in early 2008 started discussions about scaling back some of Byrd's responsibilities -- specifically, having him relinquish the Appropriations Committee's gavel. Byrd initially resisted the idea, but after the 2008 election he agreed.

Byrd continued to serve as the No. 2 Democrat on the panel and as the chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee.

His death is likely to set off a scramble for not only that slot but also reverberate through the panel in a number of other ways -- he was the No. 2 Democrat on four Appropriations subcommittees.

His death is also likely to reverberate through the Senate during what is expected to be a hectic few weeks.

The Senate is slated to take up a major financial reform bill this week and possibly a climate change bill down the road -- two pieces of legislation that may require every one of the Senate's 59 Democratic votes in order to have a chance of passage.

West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin (D) will appoint a successor for Byrd, though it is not clear under West Virginia law whether that replacement will serve until the end of Byrd's term in 2012 or if a special election will need to be held at an earlier date for the remainder of the term. The answer might hinge on when Manchin appoints a successor.

Manchin, who reportedly harbors Senate ambitions, told the Associated Press today that he will not appoint himself to fill the seat and has no specific timetable for naming a replacement.

Impact on climate debate

Byrd's death could further complicate Senate Democrats' already uphill climb to 60 votes for global warming legislation.

Byrd's support for a Senate climate bill was far from certain since he had long questioned action to curb greenhouse gas emissions. But his recent actions had signaled that he may have endorsed a climate bill if it had come to the floor this year.

In 2009, Byrd wrote an **op-ed** urging the coal industry to get more engaged on climate legislation. And earlier this month, he split with Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) to vote against a resolution from Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) that would have blocked U.S. EPA climate regulations.

"He's played a very constructive role in trying to build support for comprehensive clean energy and global warming legislation," said Daniel Weiss, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress Action Fund.

Observers expect Byrd's replacement to be less willing to support a broad climate bill, given Manchin's stance on global warming legislation.

"I don't feel very confident that we'll get the kind of person that we need," said Jim Sconyers, chairman of the West Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club. "Given Joe Manchin's position -- he's a tool of the coal industry -- no question about that."

Manchin told the AP earlier this year that a cap-and-trade system for curbing greenhouse gas emissions "will destroy the might of this nation." And in March, Manchin signed a letter with other governors urging Congress to halt federal climate rules, which they said could devastate the economy ([E&E Daily](#), March 11).

Manchin was quoted by the AP today saying his decision will be an important one because of the effects climate change and mining debates in Congress and at the federal level will have on West Virginia.

"Most West Virginia politicians oppose climate change legislation, so I don't think it's a stretch to assume that Senator Byrd's successor will also oppose climate change legislation," said Andrew Wheeler, a former Republican staff director for the Environment and Public Works Committee who now works for B&D Consulting.

"I don't think it's that big of a deal," Wheeler added, "because I don't think they were close to 60 votes anyway."

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Officials to discuss standards for water

Posted: Monday, June 28, 2010 7:07 am

By Glenn Evans gevans@news-journal.com |

State environmental regulators will consider new water quality standards this week that will raise the levels of bacteria and mercury allowed in Texas lakes, streams and creeks.

The potential action comes as Northeast Texans were confronted in recent days with spiking bacteria levels in Lake O' the Pines. The proposed bacteria levels are lower than the ones found last week, closing all seven designated swimming areas.

"The most common impairment in Texas water is bacteria," said Walt Sears , manager of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District which treats and distributes drinking water from Lake O' the Pines to Longview and other cities. "The question becomes, what's the appropriate screening level?"

That level could rise from 126 bacterial colonies in a 1 milliliter sample to 206 colonies. The proposal also raises the amount of mercury allowed in the state's waters.

It also would lower the required level of dissolved oxygen required in Caddo Lake, in a sort of test case according to Caddo Lake Institute President Rick Lowerre . Dissolved oxygen enables plants and animals to live in fresh water.

Different water uses require differing quality standards, and the changes under consideration are wrapped in altered definitions of recreational use.

The environmental quality agency did not respond by Sunday to an e-mail sent Thursday seeking clarification of certain parts of the proposal.

The executive summary for the meeting agenda item says the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "expressed concern" over expanding the number of categories of 'recreational use.' The summary said the state environmental commission received 1,455 form letters in opposition to the rule change affecting bacteria levels. It also says the EPA disagrees with the proposed change in allowable mercury levels.

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A region's new fear: An oily hurricane

Updated 53m ago

By [Rick Jervis](#) and [Donna Leinwand](#), USA TODAY



By Judi Bottoni for USA TODAY

Leo Guidroz, with wife Dolores at their home on Grand Isle, fears they may never be able to come back to their home if an oil-tainted hurricane hits. They have rebuilt twice after hurricanes.

Forecasters say tropical storm Alex is not supposed to threaten the area impacted by the BP oil spill.

GRAND ISLE, La. — Hurricanes have battered retirees Leo and Dolores Guidroz before. Katrina blew out their garage. Ike flooded their home. Each time, they rebuilt and returned to their two-story beach house, built on 8-foot stilts.

This hurricane season feels scarier, says Leo Guidroz, 77. The oil staining the nearby beach already has stolen the couple's morning routine, surf fishing for speckled trout. Thick sheets of oil bob less than 5 miles offshore.

He worries a strong storm surge would bathe their home in oil.

"You can imagine with the oil, that water will be contaminated," he says. "We might not ever be able to come back."

The threat of [Tropical Storm Alex](#)— the first significant storm of the hurricane season — has inflamed anxiety on the [Gulf of Mexico's](#) barrier islands and coastal towns. The 1,680-mile shoreline from [Texas](#) to [Florida](#) faces a volatile hurricane season with the unprecedented complication of a massive oil spill off the coast. Although the National Hurricane Center now projects Alex will hit Mexico's Gulf coast and steer south and west of the oil spill, it is predicting an unusually heavy hurricane season, with as many as 23 serious storms.

WEATHER: [Alex not aiming at Gulf oil spill area for now](#)

That is intensifying apprehension and preparations along a Gulf Coast battered first by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and now by the worst oil spill in the nation's history. Federal, state and local officials are devising plans for evacuating residents, dismantling the oil recovery operation and securing heavy equipment and ships should a storm approach. They also are considering how much compensation oil giant BP might need to pay if a storm blows oil inland.

"What we're dealing with, the oil spill, there's nothing to compare it to. We have no definitive answers right now," says Craig Fugate, administrator of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#), who began rounds of coordination calls to state officials on Friday. "With all the ships at sea and all the equipment out there, key decisions have to be made early."

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Although Alex is unlikely to set federal plans in motion, Fugate says the storm should remind coastal residents to review their personal hurricane preparations and stock up on supplies.

"If you haven't gotten ready, now is the time," Fugate says.

Alex became a tropical storm Sunday night as it moved into the Gulf of Mexico and may become a hurricane as it swirls toward Mexico's east coast, the hurricane center said. Maximum sustained winds Sunday night were 45 mph.

Forecasters say the storm is still unlikely to pass over the part of the Gulf of Mexico affected by the oil spill.

The threat of the storm moving over the oil spill area is "pretty minimal" AccuWeather.com meteorologist John Feerick says. "It doesn't look like it would have the opportunity to go as far east."

Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen, who is overseeing the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, says his team is "in constant contact" with the National Hurricane Center.

"At this point, it does not threaten the site, but we know that these tracks can change, and we're paying very close attention to it," Allen said in a briefing Saturday. "We know the weather is unpredictable and we could have a sudden, last-minute change."

Concern about spreading oil

Meteorologists describe several scenarios if a hurricane moves into the Gulf of Mexico, an event that would trigger complex evacuation procedures and dramatically disrupt the oil spill cleanup.

If a storm strikes the Gulf, it would spin water like a washing machine, says Dan Kottlowski, expert senior meteorologist at AccuWeather.com, in State College, Pa. Where it spins the oil will depend on its path, he says.

A storm that passes to the west of the spill would drive some of the oily water to the shore in a storm surge, says Chris Vaccaro, spokesman for the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#). A storm that passes to the east would spin the oily

water out to sea.

The wind and high seas might accelerate the breakdown of the oil, he says.

If a storm approaches, Allen would stop the cleanup process about five days before forecasters predict the first gale-force wind — at least 39 miles per hour — would hit the area. The Discoverer Enterprise, one of the vessels collecting oil from the ruptured BP well, needs 114 hours to disconnect from the riser pipe and move to safe harbor, Allen says.

Nearly 3,000 barges, 430 skimmers and 2,700 other vessels — including Coast Guard command and control boats — would have to be moved to secure ports, he says, and 38,634 Coast Guard, National Guard, contractors, BP employees and volunteers would potentially have to evacuate.

"We need to be able to move our personnel where it doesn't conflict with the general public evacuation," he says.

A storm would disrupt oil cleanup and recovery in the Gulf for about two weeks, Allen says, leaving oil to gush unabated into the Gulf.

In Florida, Gov. [Charlie Crist](#) on Sunday met with emergency management and environmental officials at the pier on Pensacola Beach. A forecaster said this storm was not likely to hit the state or the area of the oil spill, but waves from the storm could push more oil and tar onto Panhandle beaches, the Associated

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Press reported.

Sen. [Bill Nelson](#), D-Fla., in a letter to Allen, asked whether the Coast Guard and Navy could pre-position ships to respond in the aftermath of a storm to skim the extra oil.

"Figure several days downtime as the storm approaches, a few more days as the storm passes, and a couple more days to get things back in place — and, you're facing up to 10 days or more of the well gushing some 60,000 barrels a day unchecked," Nelson said. "That's 600,000 barrels we'd then have to collect quickly after a storm passed, and before it could hit parts of the Gulf Coast. Right now, there just isn't enough capacity or bigger ships to collect and skim that much oil on the surface."

Long-established evacuation plans for residents along Louisiana's Gulf Coast remain the same, but state officials must coordinate with BP and the Coast Guard to protect thousands of contractors, workers and employees who are cleaning up the oil, says Louisiana's homeland security chief, Mark Cooper.

The state will require BP to move its workers and equipment three days before 40-mph wind reaches the Louisiana coast, Cooper says.

"We don't want BP having all their equipment on the road blocking the highways, breaking down," Cooper says. "It's very important their timeline is based on our timeline."

Louisiana's St. Bernard Parish, a coastal community southeast of New Orleans devastated by Hurricane Katrina five years ago, has separate plans to evacuate residents and oil spill contractors. The parish will order evacuations for oil spill work sites 72 hours before gale-force winds are predicted to hit the Louisiana coast.

"Evacuation plans for oil spill operations have been tailored so as to not interfere with the St. Bernard Parish's overall evacuation plan," parish officials said in a statement.

If a storm pushes oil into the parish, officials will close the area to residents until fire, police and federal environmental experts determine the areas are safe.

At Port Fourchon, Louisiana's southernmost port,

Harbor Police Chief Jon Callais met Friday with BP and Coast Guard officials to discuss how best to move 1,000 oil cleanup workers and their tons of equipment, including a tent city where many live. Workers also are living in trailers stacked on a barge and floating in a port. Those "boatels" will have to be sailed 27 miles up waterways to keep them out of a storm's path, Callais says.

During Katrina, unmanned barges in New Orleans tore from their moorings and slammed into levees, causing more damage.

"Those are cause for concern," Callais says. "They're like floating missiles."

In Grand Isle, a 7-mile stretch of beach in southern Louisiana, trucks and bulldozers rumble down state Highway 1, and 1,800 oil-response workers live in rows of aluminum trailers.

Evacuating the workers and their equipment will clog the one road out of Grand Isle, says Deano Bonano, Jefferson Parish's homeland security chief.

BP is still finalizing plans, he says.

"It took months to bring that equipment down there. It isn't all going to leave in 120 hours," Bonano says.

A strong storm could deposit oil into southern Louisiana's delicate marshes — something cleanup crews have been fighting to prevent since the BP well exploded April 20, says Garret Graves, head of

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the state's office of coastal activities.

Cooper, the state's homeland security chief, says he's still unsure who would bear the costs of cleaning up inland oil after the storm. FEMA usually reimburses states for hurricane cleanup, but BP is responsible for costs tied to the oil spill. It's less clear, he says, who is responsible for cleaning up oil spread by a hurricane.

Fugate says the federal government is still researching legal aspects of the cleanup.

"If there is oil inland that needs to be cleaned up, we don't want to argue if it's BP's oil or some other party," Cooper says. "We just want it cleaned up."

Praying for help

As the government hashes out logistics, nervous residents of Grand Isle are seeking spiritual solace.

Since Alex formed in the Caribbean Sea last week, the offices at Our Lady of the Isle Catholic Church in Grand Isle have been jammed with phone calls from worried residents.

And lots of requests.

Parishioners have called asking the pastor, Mike Tran, to bless their rosaries and crucifixes, to bless bottles of water so they can sprinkle it on their homes, to hold Holy Communion on the beach and to throw scapulars into the surf to fend off hurricanes, Tran says.

The requests piled up so high that Tran had to call his bishop for guidance. The threat of a hurricane has amplified the island's anxiety.

"It's doubling the fear and the threat level amid the oil crisis," Tran says.

At Sunday's Mass, Tran led parishioners in three Hail Mary prayers to deter hurricanes from reaching Louisiana's coast.

"We need to pray for God's intervention," he told them.

Leinwand reported from Washington.

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Corpus Christi, Nueces County officials call emergency meetings Monday

By Steven Alford

Originally published 01:43 p.m., June 28, 2010

Updated 01:55 p.m., June 28, 2010

CORPUS CHRISTI — City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County officials are holding two meetings Monday to discuss Tropical Storm Alex.

City officials will meet at 2 p.m. today in Corpus Christi City Hall, located at 1201 Leopard Street.

Nueces County Judge Loyd Neal has called an emergency meeting of the county commissioners at 3 p.m. today on the third floor of the county courthouse, located at 901 Leopard Street.

Officials will discuss Tropical Storm Alex, which some forecasters have predicted could come as far north as Corpus Christi by Friday.

A hurricane watch has been issued for south of Baffin Bay.



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Corpus Christi City Council to discuss recycling program Tuesday

Cost analysis of options to be discussed

By Sara Foley

Originally published 09:53 a.m., June 28, 2010

Updated 09:58 a.m., June 28, 2010

CORPUS CHRISTI — How the city recycles could depend on how much it stresses the city's budget next year.

The City Council will review a cost analysis of the recycling program in its meeting Tuesday.

Under the proposed budget, the recycling program is set to be upgraded midyear. The enhanced recycling will switch out 16-gallon recycling bins for 95-gallon recycling bins that don't require materials to be sorted. That program would cost the city to implement, but save the city money over time because of less stress on the city's landfills and fewer trash pickup.

But the plan, which has been under consideration for more than two years, doesn't have unanimous support from the council.

Some council members suggested scrapping the recycling program entirely and going to large recycling canisters around town. Others oppose the upgraded system because it also reduces the trash pickup from twice a week to just once.

Others suggest keeping the recycling program as it is and reducing trash pickup also.

City officials have estimated that about 16 percent of the city participates in the program.



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Greenwire

19. **PESTICIDES:** Calif. may approve controversial chemical for strawberries

(06/28/2010)

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation is recommending approval of methyl iodide for fumigating strawberry fields, despite scientists' concerns.

An independent scientific review panel recommended the highly toxic chemical, which has caused cancer, brain damage and miscarriages in animal studies, be limited to 0.8 parts per billion as an acceptable exposure level.

"We all thought that, if anything, it should be lower than that," says Edward Loechler, a molecular biologist at Brandeis University in Boston.

Instead, the state pesticide regulators established 96 parts per billion as a safe amount, which is about half the amount allowed by U.S. EPA. The agency approved the chemical in 2007 even though 54 prominent scientists wrote a letter asking EPA to prohibit its use.

Methyl iodide is being considered as an alternative to methyl bromide, which harms the ozone layer. Farm workers applying the chemical will be the people most at risk. Strawberries grown in fields treated with methyl iodide are safe to eat, according to EPA tests that showed no trace of the chemical on or in the fruit.

Pesticide reform groups are opposing the methyl iodide's use, especially for strawberries, which are already one of the top three foods exposed to pesticides.

Loechler summed up the options this way: "Use methyl iodide and potentially risk workers' and their families' health; use methyl bromide and risk the ozone layer; or use neither and have strawberries be more expensive" (Jill Adams, [Los Angeles Times](#), June 28).
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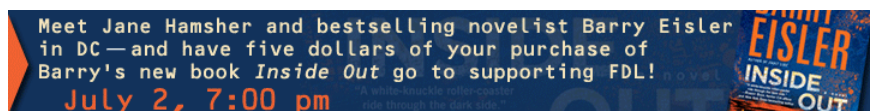
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« [DiFi Will Cave on Intelligence Reform](#)

Judicial Ethics in the Gulf: Judge Feldman's Conflicts and DOJ Malpractice

By: [bmaz](#) Monday June 28, 2010 9:39 am

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Last week Federal district court judge Martin Feldman of the Eastern District of Louisiana (EDLA), in what has become a controversial decision, overturned the six month moratorium on deepwater oil drilling imposed by the Department of the Interior. It was a legally curious decision to start with as it, on its face, appeared to be [contrary to the well established standard of review](#).

Almost immediately from the time [Judge Feldman's decision](#) hit the public conscience, information on Feldman's undisclosed (at least on the case record at issue) financial ties to the oil and gas exploration industry started coming out of the woodwork. From Saturday's [Washington Post](#):

The federal judge who presided over a challenge to the Obama administration's six-month moratorium on deepwater oil drilling simultaneously owned stock in an oil company affected by the ban, according to a financial disclosure statement released Friday.

U.S. District Judge Martin L.C. Feldman sold the stock in Exxon Mobil 14 days after the case was filed in New Orleans by a group of oil service firms — and less than five hours before he struck down the moratorium.

Feldman said in a statement elaborating on the disclosure that he was unaware of his holdings in Exxon Mobil and a smaller oil company until 9:45 p.m. Monday, the day before he issued his ruling.

"Because he remembered that Exxon, who was not a party litigant in the moratorium case, nevertheless had one of the 33 rigs in the Gulf, the judge instructed his broker to sell Exxon and XTO [Energy Inc.] as soon as the market opened the next morning," according to a statement released by his chambers and reported by Bloomberg News.

Even before this latest disclosure, Feldman was criticized by environmental groups and others for not recusing himself from the case. The groups pointed to his 2008 disclosure form, which showed that he had invested in companies involved in offshore oil and gas exploration.

So Judge Feldman not only held numerous oil and gas interest stocks, but was trading them up to and including the morning of his fateful decision, and doing so out of an admitted realization that he had an appearance of ethical conflict. Feldman owned and was trading Exxon stock, a company whose Gulf of Mexico rigs were losing money at the rate of a half million dollars a day due to the moratorium, during the entire time he was assigned the case. Yet, failing to disclose his appearance of conflict on the record or recuse, Feldman nevertheless proceeded to issue a questionable decision clearly benefitting the oil and exploration industry he is so invested in.

Let there be any confusion that perhaps Judge Feldman somehow put himself in the clear by suddenly selling off his holdings in Exxon on the morning of June 22 just hours before issuing his surprising opinion contrary to normal standards of review for such issues, keep in mind the subject case of *Hornbeck Offshore Services et. al v. Salazar* had been assigned to Feldman for two weeks and, significantly, the adversarial hearing the opinion resulted from actually occurred the day prior, June 21, while Feldman obviously still held the stock even he considered an ethical issue.

Even more distressing is the fact that it has now been revealed from Judge Feldman's 2009 financial disclosure, literally just filed and only released this week after demand resulting from his questionable ruling, that Feldman is [very heavily invested in Blackrock Financial](#) products. Blackrock is, of course, the single biggest shareholder in BP. As the [New York Times](#) put it:

No single institution has more money riding on BP than BlackRock, the money management firm that is BP's largest shareholder.

Well that certainly sounds like reason to pause, eh? There are two sources of guidance for federal judges such as Feldman in instances like this, the statutory guidance of [28 USC 455](#) and the [Code of Conduct for United States Judges](#) contained within the Guide to Judiciary Policy of the US Courts. Both sets of provisions yield the same guidance, so I will focus on the statutory provision as it is more specific and would appear to take precedence; [28 USC 455](#) provides *inter alia*:

(a) Any justice, judge, or magistrate judge of the United States shall disqualify himself in any proceeding in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned.

(b) He shall also disqualify himself in the following circumstances:

- (1) Where he has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party, or personal knowledge of disputed evidentiary facts concerning the proceeding;
- (2) Where in private practice he served as lawyer in the matter in controversy, or a lawyer with whom he previously practiced law served during such association as a lawyer concerning the matter, or the judge or such lawyer has been a material witness concerning it;
- (3) Where he has served in governmental employment and in such capacity participated as counsel, adviser or material witness concerning the proceeding or expressed an opinion concerning the merits of the particular case in controversy;
- (4) He knows that he, individually or as a fiduciary, or his spouse or minor child residing in his household, has a financial interest in the subject matter in controversy or in a party to the proceeding, or any other interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding;**
- (5) He or his spouse, or a person within the third degree of relationship to either of them, or the spouse of such a person:**
 - (i) Is a party to the proceeding, or an officer, director, or trustee of a party;
 - (ii) Is acting as a lawyer in the proceeding;
 - (iii) Is known by the judge to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding;**
 - (iv) Is to the judge's knowledge likely to be a material witness in the proceeding.

(c) A judge should inform himself about his personal and fiduciary financial interests, and make a reasonable effort to inform himself about the personal financial interests of his spouse and minor children residing in his household.

(d) For the purposes of this section the following words or phrases shall have the meaning indicated:

- (1) "proceeding" includes pretrial, trial, appellate review, or other stages of litigation;
- (2) the degree of relationship is calculated according to the civil law system;
- (3) "fiduciary" includes such relationships as executor, administrator, trustee, and guardian;
- (4) "financial interest" means ownership of a legal or equitable interest, however small, or a relationship as director, adviser, or other active participant in the affairs of a party, except that:**
 - (i) Ownership in a mutual or common investment fund that holds securities is not a "financial interest" in such securities unless the judge participates in the management of the fund;**
 - (ii) An office in an educational, religious, charitable, fraternal, or civic organization is not a "financial interest" in securities held by the organization;**
 - (iii) The proprietary interest of a policyholder in a mutual insurance company, of a depositor in a mutual savings association, or a similar proprietary interest, is a "financial interest" in the organization only if the outcome of the proceeding could substantially affect the value of the interest;**
 - (iv) Ownership of government securities is a "financial interest" in the issuer only if the outcome of the proceeding could substantially affect the value of the securities.** (Emphasis added).

A comparison of the strictures of 28 USC 455, especially those I have highlighted, with the conduct of Judge Martin Feldman cannot lead to any conclusion other than Judge Feldman has acted in violation of his ethical obligations. The standard under 28 USC 455 is recusal if there is even a question regarding the appearance of impartiality. Common practice in Federal courts dictates that, even where there are underlying facts that may mitigate a judge's duty to recuse, there is an affirmative duty imposed on the judge to disclose and explain on the record.

The evidence to date is that Judge Feldman neither recused nor disclosed and, in fact, was surreptitiously scurrying around selling interests after two weeks of having the case, and a day after presiding over the crucial hearing in the matter, in some kind of attempt to cleanse himself prior to the formality of making his decision public.

Even if Feldman did not learn about his stock holding in Exxon until the last minute, which appears to be his claim, the proper course would have been to recuse or delay until full disclosure could be made and waiver by the parties obtained if they were so willing. Instead, Feldman rushed to secretly sell his stock and then slammed out his decision favoring oil interests over the judgment of the responsible administration agency and the health of the environment for the Gulf of Mexico and the planet earth. This is an atrocious and unsavory set of facts on the part of Judge Martin Feldman and goes far beyond the "appearance of impropriety or conflict". It is hard to see how a reviewing court, in this case the 5th Circuit, could let this stand.

Which brings us to the second part of the title caption, the conduct of the government lawyers, notably the ever present DOJ. As I intimated in my [initial post last Tuesday](#) immediately after Judge Feldman's opinion was released to the public, the public protestations to the contrary, you have to wonder whether the Obama Administration's heart is really in defending their six month moratorium. First off, the Perry Masons at the DOJ appear to have violated one of the prime directives of trial lawyers, know your judge. If the DOJ researched Judge Feldman and knew his personal holdings in Gulf oil stocks and dependent interests, they sure did not evidence it or act accordingly. If they did not so research and know and understand Feldman's conflicts and prejudices, they are incompetent. Either way, there is a serious cloud of questions over the government's lawyering effort in *Hornbeck Offshore Services et. al v. Salazar*.

The cloud of questions was already present as of a couple of hours after Feldman issued his ruling. In addition to the aforementioned failure to know and address their judge by the DOJ, there was the issue of how the responsible lawyers for the government permitted briefing to be submitted in Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's name misrepresenting the nature of the concurrence of the panel of seven experts that Feldman used to excoriate the government. As I explained in the earlier post linked above, that should not have been used as the basis Feldman creatively and manipulatively used it for; nevertheless it was flat out bad, if not incompetent, lawyering by the DOJ to not clean that up before arguing as their centerpiece in defending against Plaintiff Hornbeck et. al's attack.

But from almost the second Feldman's decision was issued, the issue of his conflicts was percolating as described above, and getting stronger and more egregious by the day. With this knowledge in the public sphere at least substantially by the night after Feldman's decision, the government nevertheless did not even mention it as a ground in their attempt to stay Feldman's ruling at the district court level when they filed their [motion to stay at the district court level](#) late the following day. That motion was in front of Feldman himself, so maybe you could rationalize the government not raising it at that point (although I would have posed the motion to stay to the chief judge for the district and included the conflict as grounds for relief were it me).

Having predictably received no relief in their lame request to stay from Feldman, the judge who had just hammered them (not surprising), the government put their tails between their legs and made preparations to seek a stay from the 5th Circuit. Surely the government would forcefully argue the glaringly obvious egregious appearance of both conflict and lack of impartiality once they were free of Feldman and in the Fifth Circuit, right? No, no they didn't.

When the government filed their [motion for stay in the 5th Circuit](#) mid to late day Friday June 25, a full three days after getting hammered by oiled up Judge Feldman, and after Feldman's most recent 2009 financial disclosure had even started being released to the general public (as evidenced by the literally [damning piece on it Rachel Maddow did Friday night](#)), the government STILL did not avail themselves of the glaringly obvious argument of conflict by Feldman. Nary a peep from the fine lawyers at the DOJ on one of the most stunningly obvious arguments of judicial bias in recent memory. Furthermore, the legal eagles at the DOJ and DOI failed to effectively address and contradict Judge Feldman's reliance on the case of *Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association V. State Farm Insurance*, 463 U. S. 29 (1983), which Feldman contorted and misapplied to wrongfully reach his result (I will likely come back to the absurdity and contorted error in Judge Feldman's decision in this regard at a later date).

Feldman was required by both statutory and ethical considerations to recuse himself; at a absolute base minimum to disclose his appearances of conflict on the record; but he did neither. Any competent standard of lawyering would mandate the government to raise the issue if they are going to competently fight Feldman's ruling; but they have not, and they have engaged in other consistently questionable lawyering on this case as well.

The public ought to be asking what in the world is going on here. On all fronts.

 [8 Comments](#)  [Spotlight](#)

Tags: [BP Oil Disaster](#), [DOJ](#), [Ken Salazar](#), [BP Oil Spill](#), [Department of Interior](#), [Judge Martin Feldman](#), [Bureau of Ocean Energy Management](#), [Judicial Ethics](#), [28 USC 455](#), [Fifth Circuit](#)

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EPA to Hold Public Meetings on Hydraulic Fracturing

Date Published: Saturday, June 26th, 2010

Recently, we have been writing about issues surrounding [hydraulic fracturing](#)—known as fracking—with the safety of this process being called into question following two recent drilling accidents in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Officials in Pennsylvania have ordered EOG Resources Inc. (EOG) to halt natural-gas drilling in the state following a well blowout there this month. In [West Virginia](#), seven people were injured in a methane explosion at a well near Moundsville.

Now, Alternet writes that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is hosting four public meetings across the country on hydraulic fracturing and its potential impacts to our drinking water. The meetings are intended to give the public some information on the EPA's study and design regarding hydraulic fracturing and enable comments on the agency's draft study plan. The four meetings will be held on

- July 8: 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Central Daylight Time, Hilton Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas
- July 13: 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time, Marriot Tech Center's Rocky Mountain Events Center, Denver, Colorado
- July 22: 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, Hilton Garden Inn, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania
- August 12: (Three sessions) 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, Anderson Performing Arts Center at Binghamton University, Binghamton, New York

The Pennsylvania and West Virginia accidents occurred in the [Marcellus Shale](#), a formation rich in natural gas that lies beneath parts of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and Maryland and has seen the rapid expansion of hydraulic fracturing in recent years. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection began an investigation, and is considering possible responses including ordering a halt to all drilling and fracking by the companies involved. Investigators from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are also on scene.

In Pennsylvania, 35,000 gallons of drilling fluids were released before being contained the next day. While the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) said no fluid escaped into streams, they were monitoring to determine if any chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing seeped through the soil into underground water supplies. New York State is taking a cautious approach to hydraulic gas drilling in this region and some of its lawmakers, said the New York Times recently, are considering bills that could delay hydraulic gas drilling in the state for a year or more.

The Marcellus Shale has seen the rapid expansion of fracking recently, which is relatively new, not without some, risks and involves injecting water, sand, and a cocktail of chemicals at high pressure into rock formations thousands of feet below the surface. This opens existing fractures in the rock, allowing gas to rise through the wells, making drilling possible in areas that 10 to 20 years ago would not have been profitable. Hydraulic fracturing is used in 90 percent of the nation's natural gas and oil wells.

Energy companies tout fracking as a way of reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil and polluting coal; however, there is concern about the impact the practice could have on the environment and public health, with the major concern being over the chemicals used. The federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 exempted hydraulic fracturing from regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act, so shale gas drillers don't have to disclose the chemicals they use. According to the Environmental Working Group, fracking has been linked to drinking water contamination and property damage in Colorado, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming.

This entry was posted on Saturday, June 26th, 2010 at 2:53 am and is filed under [Accident](#), [Health Concerns](#).

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6/27/10

Local Tech professor monitors tropical storm as it nears oil spill

Posted: Jun 27, 2010 9:18 PM CDT

Updated: Jun 27, 2010 11:19 PM CDT

By Tiffany Pelt - [email](#)

LUBBOCK, TX (KCBD) – As hurricane season begins, local environmentalists are keeping a close watch on developing storms that near the oil spill, threatening to cause even more damage to the Gulf Coast.

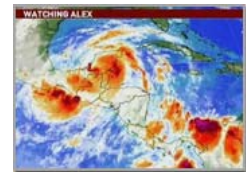
Texas Tech University Environmental Director Ron Kendall said his worst nightmare is a hurricane hitting the coast, and that oil could go as far inland as New Orleans if hit. "The only thing we can do at this point is monitor the coast line," said Kendall. "It appears at this time that this particular disturbance, Alex, will pass to the west of the main oil area".

Even if the storm doesn't hit the spill directly, Kendall said any changes in wave action where the oil is, will bring even more devastation to the coast. "The volume is getting so great now that it's a deep concern because the greater the dispersion the more potential contamination that could occur in our seafood and food chain of the gulf," said Kendall.

Not knowing where all the oil has spread coupled with the unpredictable actions of a hurricane, even the Texas Coast could be in danger. "The southern Texas Coast is an immense beautiful area that's so important to the productivity to the gulf coast ecosystem. That area is particularly venerable to oil impact," said Kendall.

Although Alex may miss the coast, Kendall said we're not out of the water yet. "Hurricane season just started. We've got a long way to go so we may get lucky this time but there's a lot of hurricane season left," he said.

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